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ABSTRACT

Recommendations of the Maryland Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education concerning the current status and future needs of gifted and talented education are presented. Recommendations are offered concerning the following issues: appropriate recognition of giftedness and services for all gifted and talented students, world-class curricular standards, system-wide flexibility, well-trained staff, a state mandate for gifted education, funding, a state definition of giftedness, a State Office for Gifted and Talented, summer centers, local action plans, local gifted and talented supervisory positions, counseling services, teacher selection, early childhood education, gifted and talented identification, provision of a range of services and educational options, appropriately challenging curriculum and instruction, mathematics and science curriculum, acceleration options, grouping practices, the local advisory council, parent involvement, community resources, teacher training standards, undergraduate and graduate teacher training programs, gifted education certification option, state-sponsored training centers, staff development, increased opportunities through use of technology, special funding and technical assistance, a gifted and talented advisory council, a statewide database, a statewide initiative, and a state report card. Appendices provide additional information on gifted and talented education in Maryland, the charge to the Task Force, a list of Task Force members and others contributing to the report, and other sources of assistance. (Contains a 60-item bibliography.) (DB)

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Renewing our Commitment to the Education of Gifted and Talented Students: An Essential Component of Educational Reform

Recommendations for Gifted and Talented Education in Maryland

Maryland Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education

Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Instruction
Arts and Sciences Branch
200 W. Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

**The printing of this report was funded through a grant from
the Center for Talented Youth (CTY) of Johns Hopkins University, November, 1994.**

Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick
Superintendent
Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Dear Dr. Grasmick:

We are pleased to send you the report of the Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education.

Over the past 14 months, the task force addressed each of the objectives that were included in the original charge. The work of the committee and preparation of the report involved much research, data gathering, and deliberation, as well as national, state, and local review.

The report includes a mission statement in "A Vision for Gifted and Talented Education in Maryland" and a discussion of current debates that affect the delivery of educational services to gifted and talented students. The recommendations are organized around 10 key questions that guided our deliberations. Source material and other pertinent information related to the study are in the appendices and bibliography to the report.

The task force believes that the implementation of these recommended initiatives will provide a foundation for a world-class educational system in Maryland — one in which academic excellence is both recognized and nurtured. It requests that you carefully consider these recommendations and take the appropriate steps to make them operational.

Sincerely.

Carol J. Mills, Co-Chairperson

Russell Beaton, Co-Chairperson
Maryland Task Force on Gifted
and Talented Education

October 1994

Dear Colleagues:

In the United States, responsibility for education has always resided with individual states, and not with the federal government. At first glance, education's status as a project of the states may seem to indicate a neglect of the critical domains of teaching and learning. But we in education know that, on the contrary, it is local control inspired by local understandings that holds the promise of reforming education.

Education is about real children, their needs, their aspirations, and their struggles along the way to meeting those aspirations. Thus, education is grounded in particulars, in the unique characteristics of individual students, schools, and school systems. At the local level, educators remain sensitive to these specifics. At the federal level, these particularities often go unnoticed or are diluted into broad bureaucratic goals and language.

The more personal observations made by local educators often lead them to develop convictions about necessary directions in our field. Because of their hands-on role in real-life educational endeavors, their assessments are valuable and must be expressed. Indeed, a willingness to confront complex and controversial issues in the field of education is among educators' most critical responsibilities. Chief among the observations educators with local practices have made is that each child is unique. This statement may seem trite or predictable, but it is actually profound and unpredictable in its ramifications. For if every child is unique, every child requires particular academic accommodations.

Our nation's treatment of gifted and talented students provides us with stunning evidence that the uniqueness of each child and his or her needs is most likely to be overlooked. Educators have become party to a frightening cultural tendency to hold the talents of highly able students in low regard, and to resist special provisions to nurture these students' abilities. The impulse towards an anonymous homogeneity in academic programming damages all children, for it denies their individual nature. Gifted and talented students, possessed of fragile constellations of abilities and enthusiasms, are clearly vulnerable to the insidious effects of the philosophy and practice of undifferentiated education.

Education is concerned with the possibility of excellence. Whatever additional aspirations we choose to embrace, we must continue to support each child in a quest for his or her "personal best," his or her highest potential for academic achievement. Our responsibility to students who already manifest exceptional academic potential is a true, tough, and telling test of our commitment to the unique learning capacity of each and every child. It is in the spirit of that commitment that this report is presented.

Sincerely,

William G. Durden, Ph.D.
Special Consultant to the Task Force on
Gifted and Talented Education
Director of The Johns Hopkins University
Center for Talented Youth

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INTRODUCTION

In September 1993, the Maryland State Superintendent of Schools established the Maryland Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education. The charge to the task force was "to study the current status of gifted and talented education across the State of Maryland and make appropriate recommendations..."

Co-chaired by Carol Mills, Director of Research at the Center for Talented Youth (CTY) of The Johns Hopkins University, and Russell Beaton, Curriculum Specialist for Gifted and Talented Education/ Communications Specialist for Frederick County Schools, the task force was composed of representatives from local boards of education, parent groups, local school systems, students, research and higher education, as well as State Department of Education staff.

The study and preparation of the report of the task force took place over a 14-month period. During that time, the task force developed a mission statement and a set of principles for improving gifted and talented education that are reflected in the recommendations of the group.

Recommendations are organized around key questions that address issues pertaining to appropriate and effective services for gifted and talented students. The initiatives contained in the recommendations, in the judgment of the task force, will not only result in an exemplary educational program for our most able students, but also have the potential for improving educational services for all Maryland public school students.

RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT TO THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS: An Essential Component Of Educational Reform

A Vision for Gifted and Talented Education in Maryland

The Maryland Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education believes the recommendations in this report present the state with the possibility to create a new vision for gifted and talented education in Maryland. Within a mandate guaranteeing the right of all students to an education responsive to their individual academic needs, the task force proposes that the intellectual and affective needs of our most able students must be specifically addressed. Curricular and instructional modifications to meet these students' unique educational requirements must be seen as a right and not a privilege.

When Dr. William Durden in his role as Special Consultant addressed the Task Force in October 1993, he presented a vision for promoting the highest standards of academic achievement for all students. The following remarks, taken from a document written by the Advisory Committee on Exceptional Children and Youth, Office of Overseas Schools, U.S. Department of State, outline this approach — the Optimal Match.

> The Optimal Match approach in education is based on the fundamental principle that **learning is a basic human phenomenon that unfolds both developmentally and contextually.** Learning is developmental in the same sense that progressive stages of cognitive ability and skills are identifiable; it is contextual in that it requires a necessary confluence of student, teacher and educational support structures.
>
> Optimal tempos of educational progress and needs vary from child to child and even in the same child from subject area to subject area and sometimes from year to year. When the **teaching context** and the **level of subject matter are responsive to the child's readiness to proceed,** an Optimal Match can be achieved.
>
> **High expectations and an optimal learning environment for each child to reach his/her highest capacities are central to the Optimal Match concept.** Students who are presented with material they already know learn mainly that school is unresponsive and that effort is not valued. Students who are presented with material they cannot grasp become disabled by their discouragement. Between these two extremes lies a **zone of appropriate challenge that spurs both new learning and a zest to master the difficult.**
>
> **While all children can benefit from an Optimal Match approach to instruction, even more carefully tailored use of this approach is required by some children.** This is true of children with special talents and even more so for students with special talents accompanied by one or more [disabling] conditions.

This vision for educational reform in Maryland and its implications for improving the education of gifted and talented students was a driving force and ever-present touchstone for the deliberations of the task force. The principles reflected in the theory of the Optimal Match influenced our thinking and thus our recommendations.

I. Statement of Mission

Renewing Maryland's Commitment to the Education of the Gifted and Talented: An Essential Component of Educational Reform

We strongly believe that appropriate programming for gifted and talented students, while only one component of the total reform necessary to improve the quality of academic environments for all

children, is a crucial, non-negotiable element of that reform. The Maryland State Department of Education must assume leadership in ensuring that appropriate services for students with outstanding talent and ability is provided in all school systems. A statewide mandate accompanied by sufficient funding - with the force of law - must serve as the cornerstone of this effort.

If appropriate recognition and services for our most talented and high achieving students are not addressed clearly and directly in our efforts to provide the best education possible to **all** students, we will have failed these students, fallen sadly short of our goal for true educational reform in the State of Maryland, and compromised our nation's future. The job of education should be to extend each child's intellectual boundaries and help all students accomplish more than they individually believed they were capable of achieving. In the name of equity and fairness, to ensure our nation's global competitiveness, and with the goal of maximizing learning for all students, we **must** transform our indifference toward, and neglect of, our most able and high achieving students into dedicated action.

Respecting the Unique Academic Disposition of the Individual Student

Students come into our schools with unique combinations of abilities and talents, learning rates and styles, hopes and dreams, problems and fears. As educators, we must recognize and be responsive to their differing educational needs. The diversity of students' needs is a fact that we must not ignore in the name of efficiency, and certainly not in the name of equity.

Children with special abilities and talents are part of the human mosaic in our schools and communities. They typically learn at a pace and depth that set them apart from the majority of their same-age peers. Because they have the potential to perform at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, they require instructional and curricular adjustments that can create a better match between their identified needs and the educational services they typically receive.

Reaching the Underserved

Outstanding gifts and talents are present in students from all ethnic, cultural and socio-economic groups. The definition that drives our identification of these gifts and talents must reflect this understanding and ensure that students from typically underserved groups have an equal opportunity to demonstrate and develop their talents.

We have not done all that could be done to appropriately identify and serve the needs of talented minority, disadvantaged, or linguistically different children. This is also true for gifted and talented students who also have a learning disability. And, we must do more to encourage talented young women to pursue challenging opportunities in mathematics and science. Although a concerted effort must be mounted on many fronts to address fully the issue of underserved groups, one important initiative is to ensure that our early childhood education programs provide students with rich, varied learning opportunities and trained teachers who look for strengths and nurture potential.

Identifying Students' Different Learning Needs

Identification of gifts and talents must occur as an on-going process extending from school entry through grade twelve. To ensure that students from the full range of backgrounds and talents are identified, schools should consider a variety of indicators of talent and ability. No one indicator (e.g., test score or teacher recommendation) should be sufficient to exclude a child from needed services if other sources document outstanding ability or talent. On the other hand, one indicator should be sufficient for further consideration of educational intervention for a child.

Although it is imperative that we challenge and encourage students with exceptional talent who are achieving at the highest levels, we must also be aware that potential in academic or other areas is not always readily apparent in student achievement. Such awareness should lead us to be more vigilant in our discovery of such potential and eager to help it blossom.

Teachers and other educators — including administrators and counselors — must understand and anticipate the intellectual, emotional and social needs of gifted and talented students, as well as the challenges and pressures associated with those needs. Although these students are affected by many of the same developmental factors as their classmates, because of their unusual ability they may encounter social and emotional issues not faced by other students.

II. Meeting the Learning Needs of the Gifted and Talented

The Maryland State Department of Education, as well as each local school system, must include in their annual plans for school improvement and excellence specific directives that provide for appropriate services to address the needs of gifted and talented students.

Approaches to education of the gifted and talented should be based on successful national and Maryland school practices, as well as on the expanding literature in the areas of education of the gifted, cognitive psychology, curriculum development, school organization, effective instruction, and school program improvement. Instructional approaches and curricular adjustments should help students locate opportunities within and outside school to demonstrate and develop their advanced skills according to individual ability and readiness to proceed.

Freeing Learning from Age-Level Expectations

Educational services should be locally selected and implemented on the basis of the identified characteristics and needs of students whose unique talents and abilities go beyond those of their peers. Gifted and talented students should not be confined by age-level expectations in their learning progress. These students should be permitted to begin instruction earlier and advance at a faster pace.

By assessing what students already know, provisions can be made for advanced instruction, extended learning experiences, and in-depth examination of topics not present in the regular curriculum. The artificial lock-step of education (kindergarten through graduate school in discrete units and in pre-defined progression) should give way to a system in which a child's progress is determined by differing levels of performance in the particular subject areas.

Students should be provided with appropriately challenging curricula and instruction matched to their abilities, achievement levels, and interests. This is particularly critical in the areas of mathematics and science education where our brightest students who are clearly capable of world class performance are not currently performing at a competitive level with the best students from other industrialized nations. To reach their potential, they must be provided with instruction and curricula that will not only permit but also encourage them to attain the highest levels of academic achievement.

Creating Frameworks of Services for the Gifted and Talented

Specific services for the gifted and talented, including instructional programs, should begin in early childhood, respond to individual strengths and needs and constantly aim for the realization of the highest potential of each child. Artificial barriers to the provision of appropriate services must be removed to allow open, flexible frameworks designed to facilitate student learning, not inhibit it. At the same time, all educators must be provided with awareness and tools

to facilitate the identification of unique or unusual talents. They must also be provided with a full range of educational options and services available within and outside the system so that they can respond appropriately to the differing needs of their students. Such services should include homogeneous grouping within a framework of flexible grouping, opportunities for advanced learning both inside and outside of the school, as well as individualized accommodations.

Some school systems — primarily because of size or geographic location — may be unable within current budget realities to provide the kind of services needed by their students. To ensure the fair and equitable treatment of students across the state, the Maryland State Department of Education will need to provide such school systems with incentives and support in the way of special funding/grants, as well as technical assistance.

Outside-of-school experiences should be encouraged, supported, and integrated into each system's educational program. In addition, schools and school systems should provide students with instruction in technologies through which they will be able to access an ever-expanding array of services that can enrich their learning experiences. The expansion of technological possibilities within a school system can best be accomplished in collaboration with the Maryland State Department of Education, as well as with state and private partnerships. The full use of community resources will enhance schools' efforts to provide better and more comprehensive educational opportunities for all students, but may be necessary to meet fully the needs of the most talented and advanced students.

Additionally, the Maryland State Department of Education must identify or create models of a tangible, on-going commitment to meeting the needs of gifted and talented students. A state-wide, annotated database available to any school or individual will ensure widespread dissemination of information regarding such models, as well as resources and learning opportunities both inside and outside the state that can enrich and expand students' learning opportunities.

One of the most successful examples of such extracurricular programs is the Maryland Summer Centers for Gifted and Talented Students. The Summer Centers have a long history of providing unique opportunities for students with outstanding abilities and talents to find intellectual and artistic stimulation in a positive, supportive atmosphere with students who have similar talents and interests. These summer programs - and other similar programs - should be continued and expanded for two reasons: 1) they have been successful in providing for the needs of highly talented students, many of whom would never have been able to receive such services in their home school; and 2) they provide valuable prototypes of instructional and curricular approaches that appropriately challenge and motivate talented students.

Planned, meaningful monitoring and evaluation are critical to ensuring that any services or programs are successful in accomplishing desired goals and outcomes. The Maryland State Department of Education, as well as local school systems, must develop and implement internal and external vehicles for evaluating services and programs. In particular, the state should develop strategies for evaluating the levels at which the most able students in the state are achieving.

Fostering Appropriate School Organization and Climate

A positive school climate fosters optimal student learning by nurturing constructive attitudes and involvement on the part of staff, students, parents and community. Administrators, teachers, and other school system staff can create a positive climate by fostering appropriate participation and active involvement among all members of the school and community. A collegial approach to school decision-making can maximize the delivery of services to gifted students in that school or system.

Students must find that school systems, individual schools and school staff willingly and eagerly facilitate their growth and development as thinkers, learners and effective problem-solvers, not that they create hurdles or obstructions or artificial barriers. Evaluation and reward structures should clearly establish high expectations, strong support and continual recognition of students' progress in learning.

Effective school organization requires initiation and assessment of alternatives for scheduling, grouping, staffing and teaching practices correlated to unique student needs. It also requires staff who are sufficiently flexible to accommodate student diversity.

Preparing and Developing Staff for Advancing the Education of the Gifted and Talented

The selection, training, development, and evaluation of staff who educate gifted and talented students, whether in regular classrooms or in specialized programming, is undoubtedly the most critical element in any attempt to provide for the special needs of these students.

School systems should develop procedures for selecting teachers who will work specifically with gifted and talented students. Such procedures should detail what is expected of such teachers, as well as the desired pre-service training requirements. All administrators responsible for hiring teachers for these kinds of assignments should be familiar with the relevant selection procedures.

Since all staff members are, in one way or another, responsible for recognizing and nurturing unique talents and abilities, they must be trained in effective strategies for accomplishing both goals. The Maryland State Department of Education should set basic standards for teacher training in this area. In addition, accreditation of teacher-training programs at the state's institutions of higher education should include gifted education requirements as a necessary component of an over-all approach that recognizes and accommodates students with different needs.

For those teachers specifically assigned to work with students with special talents and exceptional ability, in-depth training in two areas is necessary. The first involves training in recognizing students with special educational needs because of academic talent and/or unique abilities, and then training in appropriate programming and instructional strategies in response to these needs. The second deals with high levels of content expertise to enable these teachers to accommodate the advanced learning needs of talented students. This specialized content expertise is as critical for teachers at the early childhood and elementary levels as it is for teachers instructing advanced students at the secondary level.

Providing a full range of services to meet the unique abilities and needs of our most able and talented students cannot reasonably be accomplished solely by individual classroom teachers or even individual school staffs. Within each local school system, there must be someone designated to provide leadership and direction in recognizing and programming for students with exceptional ability and talent.

Generating models for adoption by local systems and locating additional resources both within and outside the state can best be accomplished by creating a staff position in the Maryland State Department of Education responsible for leadership of state-wide efforts in this area. The individual holding this position will also provide schools with needed assistance in developing local plans and implementing directives.

The need for continuing staff development to ensure clear understanding of the best ways to recognize and then meet the needs of talented students is imperative. At the same time, similar kinds of awareness-training should be provided for parents to ensure that they are able to recognize and nurture talents in their own children and to help them become pro-active partners in the educational process.

Staff development should be planned, implemented and evaluated by teachers, administrators, and other school staff in a collaborative manner. Additionally, the Maryland State Department of Education should work with the state's institutions of higher education and teacher certification agencies to develop programs within which teachers may earn a Maryland certificate in one or more aspects of gifted education. Finally, the Maryland State Department of Education should provide leadership to local systems in identifying state resources available for staff development, as well as facilitating regional (or other collaborative) staff development efforts.

III. Obstacles to Renewing Our Commitment to Gifted and Talented Students

Although many of the recommendations proposed in the 1983 report of the Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education resulted in new initiatives around the state, many of these excellent reforms have disappeared because of lack of leadership and/or funding. The 1993-94 Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education, therefore, found itself grappling with some of the same issues addressed in the 1983 report.

Unfortunately, there are today, several new elements influencing educational philosophy and practice that threaten to diminish further or even curtail appropriate academic services for talented students. A rigorous discussion of those issues that currently undermine the services available to our most highly able students is important for understanding both the content of, as well as the urgency with which we present, many of the recommendations contained in this report. (For a fuller discussion of these issues, we refer the reader to our source material found in the bibliography at the end of this document.)

Perception of "Elitism"

The current reality is that any effort to provide for the gifted and talented students in a school system may be met with charges of elitism, of doing more for the chosen few, or of sacrificing more serious needs in order to provide for those already doing well — or at least perceived as more likely to do well. It is unfortunate, but also ironic, that critics of academic accommodations for our most able students fail to see the inequity in inflexible policies that result in the same treatment for all.

The major problem with the charges of elitism leveled against gifted programs is that the premise of these charges — that gifted students will succeed on their own whether supported by the school system or not — is patently false, as demonstrated by a number of studies of drop-outs and students with discipline problems, many of whom would be classified as talented but unchallenged. Charges of elitism are also contradicted by the fact that our best students are unable to compete globally against the best and brightest from other countries and systems.

As the total educational system moves to increase the quality of programming and the level of expectations for previously underserved populations, we have an obligation to meet each student at his or her level of ability and motivation and to facilitate advancement along a spectrum of challenge and opportunity. To refuse to see provision of programming for the highly able as part of a systemic responsibility, is effectively to continue to discriminate against a subcategory of the total population with an arbitrary and indefensible illogic: that the recognition and promotion of excellence is in opposition to equity.

Opposition to Ability Grouping

The move to eliminate all forms of ability grouping and the accompanying mandate to group heterogeneously all children carries far-reaching implications for gifted and talented students. The opposition to homogeneous grouping by ability is partially fueled by budgetary reductions and accompanied by system-wide policies that teachers will meet the needs of all students in the "regular" classroom. While perhaps understandable in intent, the implementation of such policies has been extremely problematic. The resulting reality is often a one-size fits all education, or at best a "regular" curriculum with special help for students who are having academic problems. The most able are often left to fend for themselves unless they become behavioral problems or are consigned to a role as teacher's aides.

Flexible grouping options for the purposes of providing appropriately challenging instruction to gifted and talented students have been found to be highly effective in meeting these students' educational needs. There is evidence that highly able students make significant gains in learning when they are grouped with students of like ability/achievement levels so that course content, instructional methods, and pacing can be adjusted to provide appropriate challenges (Kulik & Kulik, 1991; Kulik, 1992; Mills & Durden, 1992; Slavin, 1990). Nevertheless, in an extensive review of the literature on ability grouping by Gamoran (1987), it was noted that "grouping doesn't produce achievement, instruction does." Grouping should not be viewed as an end in itself, but rather implemented as an instructional strategy to facilitate learning.

In the present educational climate, questions are now being asked about the educational right of highly able students to a fully challenging and comprehensive education provided in the "least restrictive" environment. By abandoning the often effective practice of flexible grouping, instead of using it judiciously and eliminating misuses, we will have lost a valuable educational option for meeting the needs of a variety of students, but most especially the academically talented. In a research monograph produced by the National Research Center on The Gifted and Talented, Dr. James A. Kulik notes, "...the damage would be truly profound if, in the name of de-tracking, schools eliminated enriched and accelerated classes for their brightest learners."

Opposition to Standardized Testing

The debate over traditional, standardized testing as it serves in the identification of students' abilities and needs for special services, as well as in monitoring student achievement and evaluating program effectiveness, touches on some of the most critical and sensitive issues surrounding gifted and talented education. While most of the criticisms of standardized tests have some validity in one way or another, such criticisms often are accepted uncritically as a wholesale indictment of these instruments. This leap from what began as healthy criticism to a view of all such testing as worthless, inappropriate, and even counterproductive is unfortunate and misguided.

Clearly a standardized test cannot be viewed as a sufficient source of information regarding all students; no single measure is or should be. However, the standardized test has its place and its usefulness; it can and does provide valuable and objective information about the ability and knowledge levels of many of our students. Some of the testing instruments currently used are in need of improvement or even replacement. And, tests clearly have been misused. None of these facts, however, should lead us to abandon tests and thus preclude the positive possibilities of standardized testing.

We must, in fairness to our students, continue to employ standardized, objective tests as one of the many resources we consult in determining individual students' needs for specialized services and subsequently evaluating the effectiveness of the services in meeting those needs. Assessment is important, not as an end, but as a means: it can help to locate the exact learning moment each student most needs. And, assessment can provide a common standard against which we can judge the acquisition of knowledge.

Climate of Anti-Intellectualism

Perhaps the most insidious element facing educators as they attempt to meet the needs of gifted and talented students is the current trend among young people to regard academic success as an expression of weakness. There is such an anti-intellectual atmosphere rampant among young men and women — as reinforced by attitudes expressed in popular music, the movies, the media and literature — that it is not unusual to find bright, able students opting out of challenging courses and refusing to work hard to earn high grades.

Many bright youngsters are afraid to be different from those among their peers who express contempt for intellectual excellence and high academic expectations. This pervasive disregard for learning -- which, in many instances, has a cultural context -- is of great concern for schools and school systems trying to provide fair and equitable programming opportunities for traditionally underserved populations.

The current anti-intellectualism, however, goes beyond student attitudes and is now an accepted and legitimized outlook held by many in our country. We are becoming an "either-or" society. Either we value equity **or** we value excellence when, in fact, the two are not mutually exclusive. An unabashed quest for excellence for and from all students is the most equitable stance we can take. To promote this quest, we must send a clear message that, as educators, we value the intellect, celebrate academic talent, and reward outstanding achievement whenever and wherever it occurs.

Summary: ***Reinvesting in the Education of the Gifted and Talented***

Education should nurture the intellectual, social and emotional growth of all students. Without the recognition that students have different abilities and interests, that they come to us with different degrees of accomplishment and aspiration, we will fail in this goal. The necessary nurturing can only be accomplished when all parties in the educational system — schools, systems, and the state — recognize their non-negotiable responsibility to provide developmentally appropriate experiences for all students, including those with outstanding talent and ability. This imperative shift towards recognizing the needs of the gifted and talented calls for the coordinated effort of a broad spectrum of constituencies with an interest in creating a world-class educational system. Most importantly, it requires a tangible commitment at the state level symbolized by a decisive plan accompanied by appropriate resources, as well as clear implementation deadlines.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations reflect task force consensus about initiatives needed to adequately provide appropriate educational services to students with exceptional ability or talent. Although a number of the recommendations involve new initiatives in Maryland gifted and talented education, others are designed to provide stability for existing services or address the issue of programmatic inequities across systems. Recognizing that commendatory programs currently exist in some places in Maryland, the task force believes that the recommendations in this report will reinforce these programs and extend similar educational services to students across the state.

In this report, the task force has provided a guide for local school system assessment, study, goal setting, and decision making about the improvement of educational services for gifted and talented students. Since this report reflects current thinking and research about gifted and talented education, the task force believes that these recommendations will place Maryland in a leadership role in its effort to develop fully each student's potential.

Key Question One:

What are the goals and necessary outcomes of gifted and talented education in the State of Maryland?

RECOMMENDATION 1.1.

APPROPRIATE RECOGNITION AND SERVICES

Students of all ages and from all backgrounds who have exceptional abilities, talents, or unique gifts will be recognized and supported by appropriate services and programs.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2.

WORLD CLASS CURRICULAR STANDARDS

World class standards and high academic expectations matched to students' abilities and readiness to learn, accompanied by challenging curricula across all content areas, should be found in every school in Maryland so that students with exceptional ability and academic talent will be appropriately challenged and encouraged to develop fully their individual potential.

RECOMMENDATION 1.3.

SYSTEM-WIDE FLEXIBILITY

School systems, administrators, teachers and other professional staff should be flexible enough to address the variety of needs presented by their students. They should be able to select from a variety of available services or programs in the school system, as well as the larger community, the most appropriate combination of educational options.

RECOMMENDATION 1.4.

TRAINED STAFF

Instructional and administrative staff in every school in Maryland will receive training in how to recognize and nurture talents and exceptional ability in students from all backgrounds and all ages.

APPROPRIATE RECOGNITION AND SERVICES

RECOMMENDATION 1.1: Students of all ages and from all backgrounds with exceptional abilities, talents, or unique gifts will be recognized and supported by appropriate services and programs.

PERSPECTIVE: "...appropriate programming for gifted and talented students, while only one component of the total reform necessary to improve the quality of academic environments for all children, is a crucial, non-negotiable element of that reform."

RATIONALE: The identification and nurturing of highly able students, but most especially gifted minority and disadvantaged students who have been traditionally underserved in the past, are imperative if we are to compete globally and match the world performance of other countries in academic achievement.

The 1989 Education Summit defined six National Education Goals and declared that meeting them by the year 2000 "will require that the performance of our highest achievers be boosted to levels that equal or exceed the performance of the best students anywhere." (National Excellence, 1993, p.3) We **must** raise our expectations for all students, but most especially those with outstanding talent!

The need for appropriate recognition and services for students with outstanding abilities and talents is heightened in light of the decline in the last fifteen years of the SAT scores of college-bound seniors who represent our highest achievers. It has been noted that these students perform far below potential and often enter colleges ill-prepared (Singal, 1991). When compared to the top students in other industrialized countries, our most able students perform less well on international tests. They are, however, also provided with a less rigorous curriculum, are asked to read and study less, and are rarely rewarded for academic excellence. As noted by Harold Stevenson, "In Asia, you are defying the norm by not doing well [in school]...In America, you are defying the norm by doing well." Echoing Professor Stevenson's concerns, William Durden laments that, "Good students may be becoming the pariahs of American education. We have arrived at a moment in our cultural history in which we are inspired by the excellence of athletes on the basketball court but resistant to the accomplishments of our intellectually aspiring students."

Although it is often assumed that our most able students will learn and achieve at the highest levels regardless of what the educational system does or does not do for them, the statistics sadly refute this assumption. We know that many of our most talented students languish in the classroom, uninspired and unchallenged, rarely motivated and often satisfied with mediocre performance since that is all that is expected. Various studies estimate that a number of gifted and talented students physically drop out of school, but we know that many more are intellectual dropouts.

We must provide students with exceptional potential appropriate learning experiences to develop that potential, regardless of racial or ethnic group membership, gender, wealth, or disability (Frasier, 1991). It has been suggested that we view our children as precious capital assets (Walberg & Stariha, 1992). We must be willing to invest a great deal more in those assets than we have done in the past.

"We must move toward the use of instructional programs which accommodate the diverse needs of all learners so that all, including the "gifted," can achieve their full potential."

Robert Slavin

Ability Grouping, Cooperative Learning and The Gifted

WORLD CLASS CURRICULAR STANDARDS

RECOMMENDATION 1.2: World class standards and high academic expectations matched to students' abilities and readiness to learn, accompanied by challenging curricula across all content areas, should be found in every school in Maryland so that students with exceptional ability and talent will be appropriately challenged and encouraged to develop fully their individual potential.

PERSPECTIVE: "This imperative shift towards recognizing the needs of the gifted and talented calls for the coordinated effort of a broad spectrum of constituencies with an interest in creating a world-class educational system. To reach their potential, students must be provided with instruction and curricula that will, not only permit, but also encourage them to attain the highest levels of academic achievement."

RATIONALE: Our students cannot and will not achieve world class standards, nor will they be competitive globally in any manner, without a deliberate, methodical attempt on the part of the education system to recognize their needs and to provide the kinds of educational services and programs that will nurture and support their unique talents and abilities. They cannot be expected to achieve these standards on their own simply because they are bright or talented; they need to be fully engaged in the learning process in meaningful and challenging activities and programs. Because they have the "potential to perform at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age," academically talented students require even more challenging curricula and higher standards than those provided in the overall school program.

The following statement from the Executive Summary of the National Excellence Report summarizes the need for curriculum reform in our schools:

> "Reforming American schools depends on challenging students to work harder and master more complex material. Few would argue against this for students performing at low or average levels. But we must also challenge our top-performing students to greater heights if our nation is to achieve a world-class educational system. In order to make economic strides, America must rely upon many of its top-performing students to provide leadership in mathematics, science, writing, politics, dance, art, business, history, health and other human pursuits."

Curriculum development must be accompanied by performance standards in the core subject areas that challenge students performing at the highest levels. Additionally, assessment procedures based on standards that accurately measure the accomplishments of students who perform at the highest levels must be utilized.

"We need schools...where students know that parents, educators, and other important adults in their lives set high expectations for them and watch them closely to ensure that they work to their ability and develop their potential."

National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent

Key Question One: ***What are the goals and necessary outcomes of gifted and talented education in the State of Maryland?***

SYSTEM-WIDE FLEXIBILITY

RECOMMENDATION 1.3: School systems, administrators, teachers and other professional staff should be flexible enough to address the variety of needs presented by their students. They should be able to select from a variety of available services or programs in the school system, as well as the larger community, the most appropriate combination of educational options.

PERSPECTIVE: "Effective school organization requires initiation and assessment of alternatives for scheduling, grouping, staffing and teaching practices correlated to unique student needs. It also requires staff who are sufficiently flexible to accommodate student diversity."

RATIONALE: Talents do not emerge at one set time, nor does any one service model or program type effectively meet the needs of all students with talents or high ability. School systems, as well as individual schools and teachers, must be flexible enough to address the talent when it presents itself and to seek out the most appropriate and effective type of service or program for nurturing the talent or gift.

Each school system must assess both the needs of its students and the resources available to meet those needs. In doing this, it is crucial that the system look beyond its own resources to those in the larger community and even those in a neighboring community in attempting to provide the best and most comprehensive services for its gifted and talented students. The "one-size fits all" type of general enrichment pull-out program so often used to provide for the needs of gifted and talented students, while still appropriate in some circumstances, is no longer adequate. Rather, a smorgasbord of educational options, both inside and outside the classroom, should be available so that the best match possible can be made between the educational services provided and the needs of the student. To achieve this, a system must be flexible and an atmosphere of creative problem solving must prevail.

To establish and maintain the level of flexibility necessary to effect these changes, school administrators need to adopt a model of facilitative leadership. In this context, administrators must involve, inspire, and coach staff to provide a variety of educational options to students of high ability. All staff should be working toward a more supportive, flexible, and responsive school climate for both students and teachers.

"Today's challenges require an expanded role for leadership. Beyond coping with change, leaders must tap and direct the power of participation to manage, and even to design change."

Interaction Associates
Facilitative Leadership: Tapping the Power of Participation

TRAINED STAFF

RECOMMENDATION 1.4: Instructional and administrative staff in every school in Maryland will receive training in how to recognize talents and exceptional ability in students from all backgrounds and all ages.

PERSPECTIVE: "Since all staff members are, in one way or another, responsible for recognizing and nurturing unique talents and abilities, they must be trained in creating and sustaining effective strategies for accomplishing both goals."

RATIONALE: Specialized services and programs can only be delivered in effective and meaningful ways by staff — both instructional and administrative — properly trained to recognize and respond to students with unique talents and exceptional abilities. They must also be able to evaluate the success of these efforts in terms of student achievement.

A survey of local education agencies in Maryland in 1992 revealed that the majority of teachers working with gifted students has had limited or no specialized training in working with these students. This same survey also identified staff development opportunities as the second greatest need expressed by all 24 LEAs. (MCGATE, 1992). A 1988 survey conducted by the Center for Talented Youth, also identified the need for more teacher inservice opportunities. Instructional and administrative staff must receive specialized training in meeting the educational and affective needs of gifted students and in developing skills in the teaching of high-level curricula. These training needs may be delivered through regional teacher training centers, other state-sponsored staff development opportunities and/or school-based inservice activities.

Enhanced training for instructional staff and administrators could be viewed in parallel with some of the recommendations made in the recent report submitted by the Teacher Education Task Force (June 29, 1994). These recommendations include: an enhanced clinical, school-based experience; enhanced liberal arts and sciences preparation; and the creation of a professional development ladder that would include training in the teaching of gifted students.

"Teachers must receive better training in how to teach high-level curricula. They need support for providing instruction that challenges all students sufficiently. This will benefit not only students with outstanding talent but children at every academic level."
National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent

Key Question Two:

What must the Maryland State Department of Education do in order to ensure that these goals are reached?

RECOMMENDATION 2.1.

STATE MANDATE

The Maryland State Department of Education must adopt a mandate for gifted education guided by a clear declaration of philosophy that will ensure that all school systems in the state provide appropriate services for students with unique talents and abilities.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2.

FUNDING

Adequate and on-going funding for gifted education services must be available to local systems to assist them in complying with the state mandate, but made contingent upon meeting state standards that are flexible and responsive to local needs.

RECOMMENDATION 2.3.

STATE DEFINITION

The current Maryland state definition of gifted and talented students should be revised so that it is consistent with the definition put forth in the federal report, "National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent."

Key Question Two:

What must the Maryland State Department of Education do in order to ensure that these goals are reached?

RECOMMENDATION 2.4.

STATE OFFICE FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED

The Maryland State Department of Education should establish an Office for Gifted and Talented Education to be staffed with a coordinator, a staff specialist, and a clerical support person. Additionally, a reasonable operating budget to support the duties of this office should be provided.

RECOMMENDATION 2.5.

SUMMER CENTERS

Current funding levels for the Maryland Summer Centers should be increased to ensure continued availability of these centers to qualified students from across the state. Additionally, the current implementation procedures should be reassessed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Two: ***What must the Maryland State Department of Education do in order to ensure that these goals are reached?***

STATE MANDATE

RECOMMENDATION 2.1: The Maryland State Department of Education must adopt a mandate for gifted education guided by a clear declaration of philosophy that will ensure that all school systems in the state provide appropriate services for students with unique talents and abilities.

PERSPECTIVE: "If appropriate recognition and services for our most talented and high achieving students are not addressed clearly and directly in our efforts to provide the best education possible to **all** students, we will have failed these students, fallen sadly short of our goal for true educational reform in the State of Maryland, and compromised our nation's future. ... A statewide mandate accompanied by sufficient funding — with the force of law — must serve as the cornerstone of this effort."

RATIONALE: The Maryland State Department of Education should develop a mandate that includes a philosophy, a statement of mission and guidelines for advancing gifted and talented education. It should be clearly understood in this mandate that appropriate and comprehensive educational services must be available for students who are highly able, uniquely talented, or academically advanced as part of our responsibility to respond to **all** students with special needs, not just those with learning problems or those who are achieving at a low level. By developing such a mandate, the Department can provide the leadership necessary to ensure excellence for *all* students throughout the state.

As more and more schools move to shared decision-making and school-based management, it is essential to have clear guidelines for schools' ongoing development. Guidelines must incorporate ways to ensure that all students' educational needs are met. A plan designed for the "typical" child in that school may very well overlook the needs of particular groups of students. Gifted education needs to be a piece of total school reform efforts. As we work toward excellence for all students, we must expect the most of our most talented students. If we don't, what message do we send to the general population? If we don't include services and options for our most able students as part of overall school improvement, what are we saying about the importance we place on academic excellence?

At the present time over half of the states (66%) have some type of legislation mandating the identification of gifted students; sixty percent of the states mandate programs for gifted students. The levels of funding accompanying these state mandates vary widely.

In the states without mandates, appropriate services are encouraged for gifted students and some provide state funding for this purpose; however, both services and funding are felt to be precariously dependent on the whim of decision makers and the condition of the budget.

A mandate does not guarantee excellent or even appropriate services unless other conditions accompany it. Stronger state policies, however, provide a clear mandate for services and attach funding to program standards. A mandate serves as an impetus at the state and local level for providing adequate programming for gifted students. A change in the law does not assure a change in attitudes, but if individuals are required to comply with the law or mandate there is the chance that their change in behavior can lead to a change in attitudes.

"To ignore, either directly or indirectly, the needs of gifted students is a waste of human potential. Ideally, equitable funding, mandates and legislation will result in more gifted students being served. ... Absent a state-wide mandate, gifted students in small or poor districts are less likely than other gifted students to have access to a program designed to meet their needs."

Russo, Ford, & Harris
The Educational Rights of Gifted Students: Lost in the Legal Shuffle

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Two: ***What must the Maryland State Department of Education do in order to ensure that these goals are reached?***

FUNDING

RECOMMENDATION 2.2: Adequate and on-going funding for gifted education services must be available to local systems to assist them in complying with the state mandate, but made contingent upon meeting state standards that are flexible and responsive to local needs.

PERSPECTIVE: "In the name of equity and fairness, to ensure our nation's global competitiveness, and with the goal of improving education for all students, we **must** transform our indifference toward, and neglect of, our most able and high-achieving students into dedicated action."

RATIONALE: Local school systems need financial support and assistance in implementing the recommendations in this report. Without adequate funding, statewide efforts to provide for the needs of gifted and talented students will continue to be haphazard at best and non-existent in many locations for many students. Fiscal resources and technical assistance must be established to assist each school system in assessing and setting priorities for its needs in terms of the standards set in the state mandate and in developing a plan of action for implementing the recommendations made in this report. Only with adequate state funding can these recommendations be translated into operational terms.

It is recommended that funding be adequate and on-going with flexibility in terms of local decision making as to the allocation of such funds needed to meet the standards. State funding is particularly important in addressing inequities that currently exist between counties as a result of geographic location and size of student population.

It is estimated that $1,000,000 will be needed initially in start-up funds to address adequately the recommendations of this task force. The recommendations with budgetary implications fall into the following categories:

- Maryland State Department of Education staff positions and operating budget;
- funds to LEAs for implementation of state initiatives and requirements associated with a mandate;
- regional teacher training and resource centers; and,
- the development of a statewide database containing resources and educational options at the state and national level to meet the needs of gifted and talented students.

"If state policies are to be more than words on paper, then substantial resources and support must be made available to educators at the local level to help them move written policies into active educational strategies that ensure full services to all gifted students."

Gallagher and Coleman

Gifted Students from Special Populations: Three States in Profile

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Two: ***What must the Maryland State Department of Education do in order to ensure that these goals are reached?***

STATE DEFINITION

RECOMMENDATION 2.3: The current Maryland state definition of gifted and talented students should be revised so that it is consistent with the definition put forth in the federal report, "National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent."

PERSPECTIVE: "The definition that drives our identification of these gifts and talents must ... ensure that students from typically underserved groups have an equal opportunity to demonstrate and develop their talents."

RATIONALE: The current Maryland state definition of gifted and talented students should be revised so that it is consistent with, but not necessarily identical to, that stated in the report, "National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent." In addition, the state definition should:

(a) reflect contemporary knowledge of the nature and diversity of human talents and abilities; and

(b) provide a clear and effective foundation for practical instructional planning, rather than merely leading to categorical inclusion or exclusion decisions.

The standard view that intelligence is fixed and can be measured by one test has been challenged in the past two decades (Gardner, 1983, 1993; Sternberg, 1985). The current thinking is that intelligence takes many forms and therefore requires that many different ways be used to measure it.

"It is unrealistic to insist that equal opportunity must always take the form of identical experience. Equal education for all children in a democracy must be interpreted as equivalent opportunity in terms of each child's needs and capacities."

Gertrude Hildreth
Educating Gifted Children at Hunter College Elementary School

STATE OFFICE FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED

RECOMMENDATION 2.4: The Maryland State Department of Education should establish an Office for Gifted and Talented Education to be staffed with a coordinator, a staff specialist, and a clerical support person. Additionally, a reasonable operating budget to support the duties of this office should be provided.

PERSPECTIVE: "Generating models for adoption by local systems and locating additional resources both within and outside the state can best be accomplished by creating a staff position responsible for leadership of state-wide efforts in this area."

RATIONALE: Currently, MSDE has no full-time staff position to provide statewide leadership, coordinate services, or provide technical assistance to schools in the provision of services for gifted and talented students. Symbolically, this absence communicates the idea that such services must not be very important or worthwhile. Practically, this absence has resulted in a significant reduction of efforts that had been present when there was a full-time gifted and talented education staff at MSDE. If the state is committed to the education of the gifted, it must give clear evidence of that commitment by establishing an Office for Gifted and Talented Education. In addition, support staff, equipment and an annual budget to support the effort of this office must be provided.

Research on state policies focusing on gifted education has revealed that strong state leadership is essential for effective policy development (Gallagher & Coleman, 1992). It has also been noted in policy studies of gifted education that, in general, it is the state-level policy that drives and guides local education policy and programs (Passow & Rudnitski, 1993).

In order to establish and implement an effective state policy, there must be designated staff. Without a strong state leadership role, efforts become inconsistent, fragmented, unfocused, and thus ineffective.

"In addition to mandates and funding, another sign of state-level concern for the education of gifted students is the appointment of a state coordinator in this area."

Coleman, Gallagher and Foster

Updated report on state policies related to the identification of gifted students from special populations

Key Question Two: ***What must the Maryland State Department of Education do in order to ensure that these goals are reached?***

SUMMER CENTERS

RECOMMENDATION 2.5: Current funding levels for the Maryland Summer Centers should be increased to ensure continued availability of these centers to qualified students from across the state. Additionally, the current implementation procedures should be reassessed.

PERSPECTIVE: "The Summer Centers have a long history of providing unique opportunities for students with outstanding abilities and talents to find intellectual and artistic stimulation in a positive, supportive atmosphere with students who have similar talents and interests."

RATIONALE: For over 18 years Maryland Summer Centers have provided outstanding programs for more than 1200 students per year. Budget cuts in the early 90's forced the curtailment of the programs.

Beginning with the summer of 1993, these summer centers have been organized as collaborative partnerships between MSDE and other organizations such as LEAs, colleges and universities, government agencies, and environmental groups. These centers provide talented students with unique opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to them.

MSDE should continue to support the summer centers for the gifted and talented through increased funding. In order to provide greater continuity, the centers should be funded for a two-year cycle, possibly even more for those that have been highly effective. Additional support needs to be built into the programs for a sustained staff development component. The centers have the potential to take a leadership role in regional staff development efforts if on-going support is provided.

Since 1993, educators around the state have noted that the de-centralization of the operational aspects of the centers (e.g., publicity, application process, recordkeeping) have made the process more confusing and, at times, less accessible for them. These concerns could be addressed if some of these responsibilities were again centralized in the Office for Gifted and Talented Education recommended in this report.

"This is the most exciting experience I have had in my whole academic career."
Student participant in Archaeology
Summer Center 1994

"I learned more about the Civil War here in two weeks than in six years of school."
Student participant in Summer Center for Civil War Studies, 1994

Key Question Three:

What must each local school system do in order to ensure that these goals are reached?

RECOMMENDATION 3.1.

LOCAL ACTION PLAN

Each LEA must develop a district plan describing its commitment to providing appropriate services for gifted and talented students and an annual action plan outlining identification procedures, services, staff development efforts, and evaluation processes for meeting the needs of these students K-12 across the content areas. This district plan must be consistent with the vision and guidelines established in the state mandate and implementation plan.

RECOMMENDATION 3.2.

LOCAL GIFTED AND TALENTED SUPERVISORY POSITION

In each LEA, a staff person trained in gifted and talented education should be appointed with responsibility for coordinating gifted and talented programs and services, conducting staff development activities, and monitoring the progress of gifted and talented students.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3.

COUNSELING SERVICES

In addition, there should be available to each school at least one staff member trained in understanding and managing the affective needs of gifted and talented students.

RECOMMENDATION 3.4.

TEACHER SELECTION

Each local school system should develop a procedure for selecting teachers with specific responsibility for identifying or providing services for gifted and talented students.

Key Question Three: What must each local school system do in order to ensure that these goals are reached?

LOCAL ACTION PLAN

RECOMMENDATION 3.1: Each LEA must develop a district plan describing its commitment to providing appropriate services for gifted and talented students and an annual action plan outlining identification procedures, services, staff development efforts, and evaluation processes for meeting the needs of these students K-12 across the content areas. This district plan must be consistent with the vision and guidelines established in the state mandate and implementation plan.

PERSPECTIVE: "The Maryland State Department of Education, as well as each local school system, must include in their annual plans for school improvement and excellence specific directives that provide for appropriate services to address the needs of gifted and talented students."

RATIONALE: Services for gifted and talented students vary widely from system-to-system from a minimal level of service in many areas to fully developed programs in some schools. It is unreasonable to say that a student of high ability has special needs only in grades 4 and 5 or in grade 8 and then leave that student to cope without support and without appropriately challenging curricula for the rest of his/her school career. It is equally unacceptable for students to be denied needed services and given a less-than-challenging education because of where they live.

In order to meet the needs of all highly able students, it is imperative that every LEA have a comprehensive plan on how to meet those needs. This plan should include:

- a statement of philosophy describing the system's commitment to providing appropriate services for gifted and talented students;
- an approach to identification that is consistent with the state definition;
- a description of the program options already available and those to be developed;
- efforts to train staff in how to identify students with special talents and ability, and strategies for meeting their educational needs;
- a method of identifying and communicating school and community resources available outside the regular classroom to supplement school-based services;
- a process to involve parents in the planning of their student's education;
- a description of plans for training teachers and others in the system; and
- a process for evaluating program implementation and student achievement.

Although each school system must reflect its own unique needs in this plan, it is important that the significance and intent of the recommendations adopted by the state and expressed in the mandate be maintained. There are a variety of ways in which students' needs can be met by a county, and the state should not impose a restrictive set of requirements on a system, nor should it expect that the level and type of services be the same across all counties. On the other hand, each county's plan should reflect a genuine commitment to providing an appropriately challenging and meaningful education for gifted and talented students by providing the following **minimal** services: (a) advanced academic classes at the middle and high school level; (b) opportunities for flexible pacing and acceleration options, such as those outlined in **Recommendation 4.3;** and, (c) flexible grouping options to facilitate these programming alternatives.

Without a comprehensive plan of services, these students are at risk of not meeting their potential. Contrary to what many believe, not all highly able students achieve at a level commensurate with their ability. According to Sylvia Rimm "between 10% and 20% of high school dropouts are in the superior range of tested ability...of the top 5% of our high school

graduates, 40% do not graduate from college". This indicates that the structure of schools today does not provide adequate resources to meet the needs of these students. It is, therefore, imperative that every school system in Maryland develop and implement a comprehensive K-12 approach to meeting the needs of our most able and talented students.

In developing its plan, each system should include a process for the phase-in of the plan. It is also important to involve parents directly in this process, as well as a local advisory council convened specifically for this purpose or a group already in place for other purposes.

Each county's plan should include strategies for evaluating services and programs being offered. A comprehensive and meaningful evaluation process must:

- incorporate clear goals;
- include designs that address complex issues of measurement in programs for the gifted (e.g., the need for above-grade level testing);
- use multiple data sources;
- report to all appropriate audiences in a timely fashion; and
- be easily translated into corrective action, if necessary.

The evaluation process should use both quantitative and qualitative data, including but not limited to:

- test data, including the use of off-level testing so that gifted students will not top off the scale;
- surveys of students, school staff, and parents;
- curriculum audits; and
- other local or school data.

The final report on the evaluation should be shared with the local advisory council, parents, and other interested citizens in the community. When corrective action needs to be taken either at the system or the school level, all appropriate central area offices should work with the school(s) to make the necessary changes.

At the school level, a principal should regularly assess the extent to which teachers are addressing the needs of the students in their classes. This should apply to staff in special programs as well as staff in the regular classroom where gifted students spend most of their time. It is in the regular classroom where the consistency and quality of services to gifted students is most in question.

An appropriate and challenging education should be the right of every student. We need to make sure all students are achieving because of school, not in spite of it.

"We know that high expectations produce higher achievement. Yet our expectations for most American students remain at minimum levels of academic competency...We fail to provide opportunities for students to perform at high levels...We can build world class schools; we can raise the ceilings of expectation for all students; and we can provide challenging opportunities for students with outstanding talent".

National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent

LOCAL GIFTED AND TALENTED SUPERVISORY POSITION

RECOMMENDATION 3.2: In each LEA, a full-time staff person trained in gifted and talented education should be appointed with the responsibility for coordinating gifted and talented programs and services, conducting staff development activities, and monitoring the progress of gifted and talented students.

PERSPECTIVE: "Providing a full range of services to meet the unique abilities and needs of our most able and talented students cannot reasonably be accomplished solely by individual classroom teachers or even individual school staffs. Within each local school system, there must be someone designated to provide leadership and direction in recognizing and programming for students with exceptional ability and talent."

RATIONALE: The majority of gifted and talented students in this country spend their school day in a traditional classroom setting with teachers who have neither the background nor the experience to meet their needs (Council of State Directors, 1991; Cox, Daniel, & Boston, 1985; National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented classroom survey, 1993). Although local or state policy may support the needed gifted programs, little will change for talented students unless the focus is altered to give direct attention, training and support to the classroom teacher. The local school, therefore, must be encouraged to identify personnel who will be responsible for assisting classroom teachers to differentiate instruction, identify potentially gifted students, and design grouping practices and resource programs that will supplement the regular program and enable classroom teachers to meet the needs of highly able students. This person should have training and interest in gifted education, as well as the ability to work collaboratively with the school administration and community.

In counties with a small student population and/or limited resources, it may be necessary for one coordinator to serve an entire county or for several adjoining counties to pool their resources and share a full-time staff person as the gifted coordinator. In this case, a classroom teacher, principal, or counselor might serve as the local coordinator and liaison with the county or regional coordinator.

"We need to be a strong voice that reminds all educators of the importance of challenging and nurturing the potentials of all learners, so that minimum competencies will not become maximum competencies. Without active dialogue and two-way communication between gifted education and other school change and improvement efforts, both will suffer."

Donald Treffinger
School Reform and Gifted Education - Opportunities and Issues

COUNSELING SERVICES

RECOMMENDATION 3.3: In addition, there should be available to each school at least one staff member trained in understanding and managing the affective needs of gifted and talented students.

PERSPECTIVE: "Teachers and other educators — including administrators and counselors — must understand and anticipate the intellectual, emotional and social needs of gifted and talented students, as well as the challenges and pressures associated with those needs. Although these students are affected by many of the same developmental factors as their classmates, because of their unusual ability they may encounter social and emotional issues not faced by other students."

RATIONALE: Students possessing exceptional ability or talent may camouflage their potential for a variety of reasons. Social pressures due to gender or minority status, peer influences, or family dysfunction may cause a student to hide or reject high ability and/or achievement. The existence of an "anti-intellectual" and "anti-achievement" ethic is very real in many of our schools and communities and may cause a student to question greatly not only his/her abilities, but also the level of personal motivation needed to meet success in today's academic arena. Sensitivity to these issues by trained counselors, teachers, and administrators may be the key to saving and nurturing talents and gifts that could enrich our community, our society, and our nation.

In addition, students with exceptional talent and ability often have difficulty "fitting in" to established peer groups. Their chronological peers may not be their intellectual peers, and this may result in students having difficulties relating to classmates. These students are often seen as different, and may experience feelings of isolation and even rejection. For this reason, some are at risk for significant social and emotional problems.

Because these students face unique psychological and personal issues, it is recommended that all staff be made aware of the special issues surrounding the affective needs of gifted and talented students. Because a child's social and emotional development are inextricably connected to her/his intellectual development and academic achievement, it is important for staff members in each school to be trained in understanding and managing the affective needs of gifted and talented students.

"These unique needs exist, and counseling is a necessary component in the development of talent. Gifted youngsters live in a context of ambiguity about themselves and about the perceptions of others. A developmental counseling program...will help minimize such ambiguity and will help gifted students liberate their strengths."

Colangelo
Counseling Gifted Students

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Three: What must each local school system do in order to ensure that these goals are reached?

TEACHER SELECTION

RECOMMENDATION 3.4: Each local school system should develop a procedure for selecting teachers with specific responsibility for identifying and/or providing services for gifted and talented students.

PERSPECTIVE: "School systems should develop procedures for selecting teachers who will work specifically with gifted and talented students."

RATIONALE: Because appropriately trained and qualified teachers are essential for any successful educational initiative, the procedure developed by each school to select teachers with specific responsibility for identifying and/or providing services for gifted and talented students should follow general guidelines developed by the Maryland State Department of Education, and should include the following teacher qualifications:

- evidence of some specific training in gifted education;
- successful teaching experience;
- a genuine interest in and desire to work with gifted students; and
- demonstrated evidence of advanced content competence, particularly in mathematics and science.

In addition to these criteria, other factors to be considered in selecting teachers for specific assignments with gifted and talented students should include:

- awareness of the cognitive and affective needs of gifted and talented students;
- knowledge of instructional methods appropriate for highly able learners;
- ability to impart intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm for learning to students;
- high level of energy, enthusiasm, confidence, and resourcefulness;
- willingness to seek experts to supplement the program where additional expertise is needed;
- ability to organize and manage instruction to provide for a balance of structure and flexibility;
- openness to innovation and acceptance of divergent, creative thinking;
- ability to facilitate students' independence and development of personal responsibility for their own learning; and
- willingness to pursue training for needed professional understanding and competencies.

"An unfortunate by-product of the standardized curricula of most modern schools is the depreciation of the role of teacher to that of information technician. Although teachers may be industrious and even inventive purveyors of knowledge across diverse domains, they are rarely practicing mathematicians, scientists, or musicians - that is, individuals who enjoy working in the domain."

Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen
Talented Teenagers: The Roots of Success & Failure

Key Question Four:

How should schools identify the needs of gifted and talented students and provide for an appropriate range of services to meet those identified needs?

RECOMMENDATION 4.1.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Early childhood education programs should be structured, and teachers in these programs trained, so that talents are nurtured and exceptional abilities are recognized as early as possible.

RECOMMENDATION 4.2.

IDENTIFICATION

The process used to identify students in need of special services must be on-going (extending from school entry through grade twelve), flexible, free of bias, and open to students from all backgrounds.

RECOMMENDATION 4.3.

RANGE OF SERVICES AND EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS

In order to provide the most appropriate and optimal education for students exhibiting a variety of exceptional abilities and outstanding talents, a range of services and educational options must be available.

RECOMMENDATION 4.4.

APPROPRIATELY CHALLENGING CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Schools should ensure that all students are provided with demanding curricular material, but that gifted and talented students receive instruction that goes beyond the regular school program.

RECOMMENDATION 4.5.

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE CURRICULUM

A rigorous and challenging curriculum in mathematics and science should be provided for all students, including gifted and talented students who are capable of exceptional performance in these areas, beginning in elementary school and continuing through high school.

RECOMMENDATION 4.6.

ACCELERATION OPTIONS

Any instructional or administrative barriers to appropriate acceleration options, including early entrance to school or college, should be removed. In addition, pre-assessment procedures should be routinely used in the classroom in all curricular areas to determine what students already know so that enriched and extended learning experiences can occur.

RECOMMENDATION 4.7.

GROUPING PRACTICES

Schools should maintain flexible grouping practices that include homogeneous grouping as an appropriate and necessary option for gifted and talented students while ensuring that inappropriate uses of tracking are eliminated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Four: ***How should schools identify the needs of gifted and talented students and provide for an appropriate range of services to meet those identified needs?***

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

RECOMMENDATION 4.1: Early childhood education programs should be structured, and teachers in these programs trained, so that talents are nurtured and exceptional abilities are recognized as early as possible.

PERSPECTIVE: "Specific services for the gifted and talented, including instructional programs, should begin in early childhood, respond to individual strengths and needs and constantly aim for the realization of the highest potential of each child."

RATIONALE: Quality instruction should begin in early childhood, respond to individual strengths and needs, and constantly aim for the highest potential for the child. Early childhood programs such as Title I, Extended Elementary Education Program (EEEP) and Headstart, should create awareness of the need to recognize and nurture talent, and MSDE should provide leadership for this change.

Young children need rich, varied learning opportunities and trained teachers who look for strengths and nurture potential. Services to potentially gifted primary children should match their changing developmental needs with emphasis on broad-based knowledge acquisition and problem solving. On the other hand, young children exhibiting advanced mental, social, and psychological maturity should be considered for early admission to kindergarten or grade-level advancement. Ideally, schools should tailor access to unique learning opportunities to match the strengths and needs of each child.

As schools engage in preschool screening for kindergarten, Headstart, and other preschool programs, staff should be alert to early recognition of students' strengths. While noticing students' deficits is very important, early signs of academic potential such as an interest in reading, advanced mathematical understanding or possession of a large fund of knowledge, should also be noted. Early Childhood programs must create a balance that makes provisions for students with advanced skills who need academics early while, at the same time, providing for students with unusual potential who demonstrate problem solving skills but require a more developmental approach to reading and mathematic instruction.

Early identification of gifted students, K-3, is frequently recommended, but seldom implemented. Most gifted services begin in the upper elementary grades. Delaying identification compounds problems associated with finding gifted minority students, especially those students from disadvantaged backgrounds. If such children are not found early, they are unlikely to receive appropriate instruction and may develop a poor academic self-image.

The greatest untapped talent in the nation "lies among the disadvantaged minority populations" (Torrance, 1970; 1977). These students come to school less ready to profit from school experiences. Poverty, lack of early enrichment experiences and differences in language and culture often prevent them from refining and extending their skills. Rich early childhood opportunities can reverse the delays and provide occasions for outstanding gifts and talents to be recognized and nurtured (Gregory, Starnes, & Blaylock, 1987).

"To compete on an equal footing with the rest of the world, we must start our children down the path to excellence when they are very young. Learning is cumulative; all students including the gifted, develop to their full potential only when their special strengths are identified and supported throughout their lives. This is particularly true for economically disadvantaged children because they often face so many impediments to success."

National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent

Key Question Four: ***How should schools identify the needs of gifted and talented students and provide for an appropriate range of services to meet those identified needs?***

ON-GOING AND FLEXIBLE IDENTIFICATION

RECOMMENDATION 4.2: The process used to identify students in need of special services must be on-going (extending from school entry through grade twelve), flexible, free of bias, and open to students from all backgrounds.

PERSPECTIVE: "Identification of gifts and talents must occur as an on-going process extending from school entry through grade twelve. To ensure that students from the full range of backgrounds and talents are identified, schools should consider a variety of indicators of talent and ability."

RATIONALE: If appropriate educational experiences are to be provided, students' needs must be identified. For some students the identification process will be quite easy and the special need obvious. But this is not the case for many other students. For a variety of reasons, students from a number of subgroups are often overlooked and underserved.

In a special issue of The Journal for the Education of the Gifted, Gallagher (1987) referred to the subgroup of gifted children who are poorly recognized and insufficiently supported by services for the gifted and talented as the "gifted underserved." In addition to ethnic minorities, economically disadvantaged, preschool, learning disabled, gifted females and underachievers, this group included all children who suffer neglect because of insufficient conditions and opportunities to nurture, stimulate, and guide them to their full potential. This includes highly able students whose disruptive behavior may prevent them from being recognized as "gifted."

The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Act of 1988 was created to "give highest priority" to gifted students who are traditionally underserved. These underserved students have been described in several studies.

- Gay (1989) and Ford & Harris (1990) determined that as many as 50% of low SES gifted students enrolled in public schools are not identified by current identification procedures. Tyler-Wood (1992) suggests that the primary reason low SES students do not meet criteria for gifted services is low test scores on verbal subtests.

- Recent studies (Frasier, 1991) have documented the ratio of non-ethnic/minority students to ethnic/minority students receiving gifted programming as approximately 5:1, a ratio that has persisted since the early 1970's. Relying solely on the performance of a single standardized test offers little understanding of talent among our most capable Black students (Ford & Harris, 1990; Patton, 1992).

- Tomlinson and colleagues (1993) lament the failure to implement a uniform and consistent procedure for identifying mathematical and scientific abilities among female students at all grade levels.

- According to Daniels (1983) and others (Fox, Brody, & Tobin, 1983), there exists a group of students who can legitimately be called gifted and yet at the same time be labelled learning disabled. This group remains largely unidentified and insufficiently served (Brody & Mills, in press).

Special strategies that can be used to inform and motivate referrals of all the "gifted underserved" must be evaluated and considered. Furthermore, staff must be adequately trained to recognize talent in these groups. Educators should be provided with the skills needed to recognize the many kinds of characteristics, strengths, talents, and needs represented in these underserved groups. If students with talent from these groups are never recognized and referred, then they will never be represented at the assessment, classification, and placement stages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Four: ***How should schools identify the needs of gifted and talented students and provide for an appropriate range of services to meet those identified needs?***

Traditional identification methods have resulted in an under-representation of minorities and other underserved groups receiving gifted services. Districts that use IQ scores as the sole criterion in the identification of gifted and talented students are more likely to discover larger disparities among racial and ethnic groups. Ensuring that students from a full range of backgrounds are identified requires the use of multiple sources of information. Few points have received more consistent support from the literature (Clark, 1993; Feldhusen, 1986; Gallagher, 1993; Renzulli, 1986; Sternberg & Davidson, 1986).

The purpose of identification should be to identify students who need curricular and instructional modifications in their educational program because of documented talent, exceptional academic achievement or aptitude, or clear potential to achieve at a high level. It should be a means to an end and not an end in itself.

"Outstanding talent" or "exceptional ability" should be clearly defined as that portion of the student population in a school whose academic needs are clearly not being met by the regular classroom instruction and curriculum. Specific criteria and procedures should be outlined to assist teachers, administrators, and parents in deciding whether a particular programming option is most appropriate for a particular child or group of students.

Identification should not be viewed as a way of conveying special status on students (i.e., simply placing the "mantle of giftedness" upon students). Likewise, identifying students for "gifted programs" any student could benefit from is not defensible. The identification process adopted by a school should be designed to document academic need and followed by an educational response that can be easily justified as necessary to meet that need.

While definitions may vary somewhat in their emphasis, the identification process should be:

- **Ongoing**. Developmentally appropriate procedures to recognize talent and unusual potential should begin as early as the preschool years, be integrated with preschool programming, and should be on-going throughout the secondary school years.

- **Accommodating of variety** - Identification should be designed to look throughout a range of disciplines for students with diverse talents.

- **Reliant on a variety of assessment measures.** The identification process should consider multiple indicators of talent with information obtained from many sources. Teachers and staff who are trained to look for indicators of talent and exceptional ability can be an invaluable component of the identification process.

- **Free of bias**. Identification should provide students from all backgrounds with equal access to appropriate academic programming.

- **Non-exclusionary**. Single test scores should not be used to exclude students from services if other indicators point to a need. On the other hand, the option of using test scores for documenting the need for special programming should be available. Highly able students who have been insufficiently challenged often underachieve in the classroom and may lose the motivation so often equated with gifted behavior. For many of these students, aptitude test scores may be the only indicator of exceptional ability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Four: ***How should schools identify the needs of gifted and talented students and provide for an appropriate range of services to meet those identified needs?***

- **Sensitive to achievement differences.** Identification must recognize those students with observable achievement who are most obviously in need of curricular and instructional modification. It is also important, however, to recognize those students with talent and ability who are not yet achieving to full potential. The appropriate services and programming for these two groups of students may, however, be quite different.

- **Matched with an appropriate range of services and programs.** Just as an identification process should include a variety of assessment instruments and many sources of information, so should the programmatic responses to identification be varied. Identification should not only support programming efforts, but should be integrated into curriculum initiatives. Most importantly, programmatic options should be carefully matched to identification so that an optimal match can be obtained between identified need and the educational response.

- **Integrated with identification of students with other educational needs (i.e., special education).** No student should be excluded from needed services in one area because of documented need in another. Students who are gifted and have a learning disability are in need of services that span both special education and gifted education.

"...talent is best viewed as a developmental rather than as an all-or-nothing phenomenon. It is a process that unfolds over many years rather than a trait that one inherits and then keeps unchanged for the rest of life."

Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen
Talented Teenagers: The Roots of Success & Failure

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Four: ***How should schools identify the needs of gifted and talented students and provide for an appropriate range of services to meet those identified needs?***

RANGE OF SERVICES AND EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS

RECOMMENDATION 4.3: In order to provide the most appropriate and optimal education for students exhibiting a variety of exceptional abilities and outstanding talents, a range of services and educational options must be available.

PERSPECTIVE: "Educational services should be locally selected and implemented on the basis of the identified characteristics and needs of students whose unique talents and abilities go beyond those of their peers. Gifted and talented students should not be confined by age-level expectations in their learning progress. These students should be permitted to begin instruction earlier and advance at a faster pace."

RATIONALE: A comprehensive approach to facilitate the development of programming for gifted learners will uncover, encourage, and nurture their talents. Since there is no one best way to meet the needs of highly able students who may have very different talents and abilities, the following exemplary educational strategies for meeting the needs of advanced learners are suggested:

- **Flexible Pacing** - allowing students to advance as they master content and skills.
- **Acceleration** - allowing students to be placed at the level of a discipline that is appropriate to their talent and knowledge, which may include:
  - *early entrance to kindergarten or the first grade;*
  - *grade skipping;*
  - *advanced placement in a subject* (without being assigned to a higher grade, the student is placed for part of the day with students at more advanced grade levels for one or more subjects);
  - *concurrent enrollment* in elementary/middle school, middle/high school, high school/college;
  - *summer school acceleration programs*
  - *curriculum compacting* (the student is given reduced amounts of introductory activities, drill, and review so that the time saved may be used to move more quickly through the curriculum;
  - *telescoping curriculum* (the student spends less time than usual in a course of study; e.g., completes a one-year course in one semester);
- **Enrichment** - giving students the opportunity to go deeper and wider into subject matter depending on their interest and motivation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Four: ***How should schools identify the needs of gifted and talented students and provide for an appropriate range of services to meet those identified needs?***

- **Instructional Strategies and Modification** - focusing on instructional techniques that are open-ended and that create multiple opportunities for students' expression of talents and abilities.
- **Curriculum Modification** - focusing on three variables: the content of the lesson, the process by which students are to learn, and the product the students are to produce.
- **Mentor Programs** - allowing students to pursue advanced-level investigations with a professional at the workplace.
- **Independent Study/Research Investigations** - providing students with opportunities to conduct a research investigation where they identify a real problem or question, use appropriate methodologies to conduct the research, and develop a product to communicate their findings to an authentic audience.

"Teachers are giving up the notion that children can, or should be made to, fit the school, and are turning to the rational endeavor of fitting the school to the needs and capacities of children."

Leta Hollingworth
Problem Children

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Four: ***How should schools identify the needs of gifted and talented students and provide for an appropriate range of services to meet those identified needs?***

CHALLENGING CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

RECOMMENDATION 4.4: Schools should ensure that gifted and talented students are provided with demanding curricular material and instruction that goes beyond the regular school program.

PERSPECTIVE: "Students should be provided with appropriately challenging curricula and instruction matched to their abilities, achievement levels, and interests."

RATIONALE: Curricula should be developed and structured to provide rigor and challenge for all students including the gifted and talented. To ensure that highly able students are sufficiently challenged, local systems and the Maryland State Department of Education should cooperatively develop curricular standards that not only raise the "floor" (minimum levels of accomplishment) but also raise the "ceiling" (the highest levels of academic accomplishment).

Emphasis should be placed on the development of integrated curricula (multidisciplinary) using an inquiry approach. The curriculum should include accelerated and enriched content, as well as contexts that promote the application of different thinking processes. The curriculum should allow students to create advanced and novel products, as well as help them to develop productive habits of mind.

Bright students respond to rigorous content and need comprehensive and advanced high-level K-12 learning opportunities. A variety of assessment procedures, based on curriculum standards, that include the use of portfolios, exhibitions, and demonstrations should be developed to measure the accomplishments of highly able students. Establishing academic **benchmarks** and providing high-level learning opportunities will motivate students with outstanding talents to increase their knowledge, refine their creative abilities, produce works commensurate with their aptitude, and achieve world-class standards.

"The advocacy of a rich and rigorous core curriculum need not ignore the fact that individual students present their schools with distinctive requirements, interests, and problems. Students possess a range of abilities ... We may vary our pedagogy to achieve our educational goals, but we must jealously retain and guard those goals: mastery of a common core of worthwhile knowledge, important skills, and sound ideals."

William J. Bennett
American Education: Making It Work

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE CURRICULUM

RECOMMENDATION 4.5: A rigorous and challenging curriculum in mathematics and science should be provided for all students, including gifted and talented students who are capable of exceptional performance in these areas, beginning in elementary schools and continuing through high school.

PERSPECTIVE: "[A rigorous and challenging curriculum] is particularly critical in the areas of mathematics and science education where our brightest students who are clearly capable of world class performance are not currently performing at a competitive level with the best students from other industrialized nations."

RATIONALE: According to the federal report, "National Excellence," America's most able students do not learn as much as they could and compare unfavorably with students in other countries especially in the areas of mathematics and science. The assumption that America's best students currently measure up to students anywhere is false. International test data in mathematics and science compiled during the last decade clearly indicate that American students are not receiving as challenging an education as students in other nations. For example, a study comparing U.S. seniors taking Advanced Placement courses with top students in 13 other countries reveals that American students placed:

- 13th out of 13 in biology
- 11th out of 13 in chemistry; and
- 9th out of 13 in physics.

In mathematics, the top 1 percent of American students scored very poorly when compared to a similar group of students in 13 countries:

- 13th out of 13 in algebra; and
- 12th out of 13 in geometry and calculus.

The poor performance of America's brightest students continues into college and the professional world. During the last 20 years, graduate school enrollments of American students in mathematics and science have declined while the number of foreign-born students has risen. American corporations such as Texas Instruments and IBM continue to hire people from outside the U.S., especially in research, because of the shortage of mathematics and science graduate students. In order for America to remain competitive in the global market, emphasis must be placed on establishing comprehensive and advanced learning opportunities for students with outstanding talents. Challenging all students by demanding more of them, including America's most talented, will result in a populace that can deliver the high level of skills and expertise needed for successful participation in the global society.

"...gifted and talented children represent a significant resource to any nation and it is profitable to the nation in many ways to invest in their healthy development and their education. Such an investment extends equal educational opportunity to them, just as legislation and public funding have provided such opportunity to other exceptional children."

Lita Linzer Schwartz
"Why Give Gifts to the Gifted?"

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Four: ***How should schools identify the needs of gifted and talented students and provide for an appropriate range of services to meet those identified needs?***

ACCELERATION OPTIONS

RECOMMENDATION 4.6: Any instructional or administrative barriers to appropriate acceleration, including early entrance to school or college should be removed. In addition, pre-assessment procedures should be routinely used in the classroom in all curricular areas to determine what students already know so that enriched and extended learning experiences can occur.

PERSPECTIVE: "The artificial lock-step of education (kindergarten through graduate school in discrete units and in pre-defined progression) should give way to a system in which a child's progress is determined by differing levels of performance in the particular subject areas."

RATIONALE: Students with outstanding talents require a different instructional approach that is not bound to age-level expectations. Administrative barriers and artificial ceilings that hinder ready access to acceleration options demand attention and removal.

The value of acceleration as an option for meeting the academic needs of highly able students has been well-documented by research (Kulik & Kulik, 1984; Pollins, 1983). Early entrance to kindergarten or first grade should be available to children with demonstrated ability, as should early entrance to college for students who have completed high school requirements. In addition, schools should remove any artificial barriers preventing access to college-level courses to any student with the ability and skills needed to be successful in such courses. Although there are no regulations preventing these kind of acceleration options, many schools still refuse to allow talented students these much-needed opportunities to be challenged.

In addition, instructional programs should provide vehicles for pre-assessment to determine what students already know. With this knowledge teachers can compact or eliminate and replace that part of the curriculum with extended and accelerated experiences that allow for more in-depth curriculum, as well as the examination of topics related to, but not included in, the regular classroom curriculum. Pre-assessment procedures should be available in all curricular areas, implemented upon request, and teachers assisted in translating this information into classroom practice. Teachers, however, should also be encouraged to watch for students who have mastery of material before instruction begins.

"Gifted and talented elementary school students have mastered from 35 to 50 percent of the curriculum to be offered in five basic subjects before they begin the school year. Most regular classroom teachers make few, if any, provisions for talented students."

National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Four: ***How should schools identify the needs of gifted and talented students and provide for an appropriate range of services to meet those identified needs?***

GROUPING PRACTICES

RECOMMENDATION 4.7: Schools should maintain flexible grouping practices that include homogeneous grouping as an appropriate and necessary option for some students at some time while ensuring that inappropriate uses of tracking are eliminated.

PERSPECTIVE: "Flexible grouping options for the purposes of providing appropriately challenging instruction to gifted and talented students have been found to be highly effective in meeting these students' educational needs."

RATIONALE: It has been shown that grouping students with intellectual peers so that appropriate pacing of instruction can occur is an appropriate, viable, and necessary strategy for maximizing talent development and responding to the needs of highly able students (Kulik & Kulik, 1991; Kulik, 1992; Mills & Durden, 1992; Slavin, 1990). While rigid grouping practices such as early and comprehensive tracking based solely on a single IQ score are clearly inappropriate, as are less than appropriately challenging material for any group of students, it is equally unreasonable to preclude a variety of flexible grouping options as a strategy for meeting the needs of highly able students.

Clearly, homogeneous grouping by ability and/or achievement allows for more appropriate, rapid, and advanced instruction matched to the rapidly developing skills and capabilities of highly able students. A balance needs to be achieved so that talented students have the opportunity to work in homogeneous groups, in heterogeneous groups, and individually depending on the content area and task involved.

"Under today's practices, high-ability students are forced to spend more time than they need on a curriculum developed for students of moderate ability. Many become bored, unmotivated, and frustrated. They become prisoners of time."

National Education Commission on Time and Learning
Prisoners of Time

Key Question Five:

How can parents and community resources be best used to assist schools in meeting the needs of gifted and talented students?

RECOMMENDATION 5.1.

LOCAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

A local advisory council at the district level should be established to assist in developing local action plans and identifying community resources to supplement educational services for gifted and talented students.

RECOMMENDATION 5.2.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Schools should develop a process that will actively involve parents as equal partners in the development of a plan to meet the educational needs of students whose needs are not being met by the regular academic program.

RECOMMENDATION 5.3.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Schools and school systems should develop partnerships and collaborative programs with businesses, colleges and universities, and other community groups to strengthen educational programs, services, and experiences for gifted and talented students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Five: ***How can parents and other community resources be best used to assist schools in their efforts to meet the needs of gifted and talented students?***

LOCAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

RECOMMENDATION 5.1: A local advisory council at the district level should be established to assist in developing local action plans and identifying community resources to supplement educational services for gifted and talented students.

PERSPECTIVE: "A positive school climate fosters optimal student learning by nurturing constructive attitudes and involvement on the part of staff, students, parents and community. Administrators, teachers, and other school system staff can create a positive climate by fostering appropriate participation and active involvement among all members of the school and community."

RATIONALE: Providing challenging opportunities for all students with outstanding talent will take a coordinated effort by a broad spectrum of constituencies with an interest in creating a world-class educational system. Establishing a local advisory council made up of a cross-section of representatives from the school system and the larger community, including local parents, will provide the leadership and knowledge needed for each subdivision to provide adequately for their gifted students.

School systems are implementing processes for shared decision-making at the school level in recognition of research that shows this decision-making process to be more effective in securing commitment to change. When people feel a part of the process, generally the process is implemented more effectively. Establishing a local advisory council will give a voice to all those who are affected by the plans for gifted education services and will also engage the community in identifying and making community resources accessible to the school system. Ideally, each school improvement team should include a representative of each subgroup of students including gifted and talented, so that the subgroups' issues and concerns will be recognized.

Although the ideal situation is the creation of a council convened specifically for the purposes above, the responsibilities of such a council could be adopted by a group already in place for one or more other purposes.

"School reform cannot work if it is imposed on the community top-down. Genuine, long-lasting reform grows from the grassroots."

National Education Commission on Time and Learning
Prisoners of Time

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Five: ***How can parents and other community resources be best used to assist schools in their efforts to meet the needs of gifted and talented students?***

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

RECOMMENDATION 5.2: Schools should develop a process that will actively involve parents as equal partners in the development of a plan to meet the educational needs of students whose needs are not being met by the regular academic program.

PERSPECTIVE: "At the same time, far greater efforts must be extended to provide similar kinds of awareness-training for parents to ensure that they are able to recognize and nurture talents in their own children and to help them become proactive partners in the educational process."

RATIONALE: Parents are critical to the development of talent in children. According to a study by the Center for Talented Youth (CTY) at The Johns Hopkins University, significant factors in talent development are "early and ongoing parental support and intellectual stimulation." Therefore, it makes sense for schools to design ways in which parents can be a critical part of their child's educational planning.

Schools need to develop a process that will actively involve parents as equal partners in the development of a plan to meet the educational needs of any student whose needs are not being met by the regular academic program. This is especially true for those subgroups of talented students who continue to be underserved. These are students whose abilities may not be readily recognized and who often need even more specialized services. These groups include:

(1) The child with exceptional giftedness in one or more curricular areas;

(2) Gifted students who have a learning disability that masks their ability, or whose strengths are neglected in order to address particular weaknesses;

(3) Disruptive youth whose behaviors mask their high abilities or whose giftedness causes the disruptiveness;

(4) The underachieving gifted child who has high potential but lacks certain skills or motivation necessary to consistently achieve at the expected level.

For these students, the development of a very individualized set of goals and objectives to help them achieve will require the best problem-solving efforts of parents and educators working together in a cooperative and collegial atmosphere. It is to everyone's benefit for this type of relationship to be encouraged and to become standard practice.

For situations where the educational services provided are not adequate to meet the student's needs, schools must have in place an advocacy process that is clearly defined, as well as an appeals process that is not burdensome.

Finally, state and local advocacy groups are critical to a parent/community voice and should be supported by the local and state departments of education. Such groups can be used to help disseminate information to parents and community, and to help parents become better advocates for their children. Local schools can, and should, facilitate contact between families for the purpose of establishing and supporting such local advocacy groups.

"The role that parents of gifted and talented students play is often forgotten in the confusion of trying to implement and maintain programs for their children."

Beverly Parke
Gifted Students in Regular Classrooms

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Five: ***How can parents and other community resources be best used to assist schools in their efforts to meet the needs of gifted and talented students?***

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

RECOMMENDATION 5.3: Schools and school systems should develop partnerships and collaborative programs with businesses, colleges and universities, and other community groups to strengthen educational programs, services, and experiences for gifted and talented students.

PERSPECTIVE: "Outside-of-school experiences should be encouraged, supported, and integrated into each system's educational program."

RATIONALE: Schools should work in collaboration with parents and community leaders to find all available options and opportunities to help motivate students to excel and reach their full potential. To this end, partnerships and collaborative programs with businesses, colleges and universities, and other community groups should be developed. In this way educational programs, services, and experiences for gifted and talented students can be strengthened and expanded.

Furthermore, outside-of-school experiences such as internships, opportunities to work with experts or mentors, or academic coursework at a local college or in a summer program like that conducted by the MSDE or the Center for Talented Youth at The Johns Hopkins University should be recognized as legitimate educational options that supplement and enrich the school's attempts to meet the needs of talented students. Such options should be encouraged, supported, and integrated into a student's full educational program. Credit should be awarded if legitimate academic work is successfully completed. Certainly, such experiences should be considered when placement decisions are made. Where appropriate for placement decisions, competency tests could be available to document the extent of learning as a result of these extracurricular activities.

Finally, each local system should establish a database (modeled after a similar database maintained by MSDE staff) that identifies these local resources and nontraditional options so that they can more comprehensively meet the full range of needs represented in their student population. Parents, teachers, and students should be informed of, and have access to, this database. In developing this database, the newest technology should be employed (through assistance from the state) with the goal of developing a system where eventually student records, achievement levels, and strengths and interests can be matched to the resource database and a list of services and programs can be generated that matches that student's profile. Each school should be linked to the system database with the option of including local school resources for in-school use. This option should be available to all students in the system.

In the case of counties with a small student population and/or few resources, several adjoining systems could pool their resources and develop a regional database.

"The barriers between teacher and student, adult and child, school and community must become more permeable, so that the individual student's desire to know may be nourished by the resources of the larger community."

Durden and Tangherlini

Smart Kids: How Academic Talents are Developed and Nurtured in America

Key Question Six:

What must the state, higher education, and local systems do to provide appropriate training for teachers and administrators in how to accommodate the needs of gifted and talented students?

RECOMMENDATION 6.1.

TEACHER TRAINING STANDARDS

The Maryland State Board of Education and the Maryland State Department of Education should set basic standards for teacher training in talent development and gifted education.

RECOMMENDATION 6.2.

UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

Teacher preparation programs throughout the state should incorporate topics and issues related to identification of, and appropriate services for, students with exceptional gifts and talents.

RECOMMENDATION 6.3.

GIFTED EDUCATION CERTIFICATION OPTION

A Maryland Certification in Gifted Education should be developed and made available for teachers who wish to pursue this option.

RECOMMENDATION 6.4.

STATE-SPONSORED TRAINING CENTERS

The state should develop regional training centers for staff development in counties with small student populations.

RECOMMENDATION 6.5.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Local school systems should include talent identification, talent development and gifted education topics as part of in-service training for all staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Six: ***What must the state, higher education, and local systems do to provide appropriate training for teachers and administrators?***

TEACHER TRAINING STANDARDS

RECOMMENDATION 6.1: The Maryland State Board of Education and the Maryland State Department of Education should set basic standards for teacher training in talent development and gifted education.

PERSPECTIVE: "The first involves training in recognizing students with special educational needs because of academic talent and/or unique abilities, and then training in appropriate programming and instructional strategies in response to these needs. The second deals with high levels of content expertise to enable these teachers to accommodate the advanced learning needs of talented students."

RATIONALE: A variety of opportunities exists for teachers to receive the training required for the successful implementation of advanced programs. However, the survey of school systems in Maryland conducted by the task force revealed that implementation of staff development programs in the area of gifted and talented education is very uneven. A number of systems requested assistance from the state both in defining what adequate staff development in this area requires and in coordinating efforts across the state.

The Maryland State Board of Education and the Maryland State Department of Education should define appropriate training in the area of gifted education and talent development, including the content of courses and a list of other appropriate training experiences for teachers of the gifted, including conferences, apprenticeships, mentorships, and practica.

Further, the Maryland State Department of Education's Office for Gifted and Talented Education should serve as coordinator of staff development services throughout the state. In addition to supporting opportunities for school systems to network in meeting training needs, MSDE should also provide leadership through efforts such as conferences and state-wide meetings.

"Teachers are the key to success in our vision of excellent education. They must be prepared to work with advanced materials and to use complex teaching strategies with a variety of students."

National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Six: ***What must the state, higher education, and local systems do to provide appropriate training for teachers and administrators?***

UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

RECOMMENDATION 6.2: Accredited teacher preparation programs throughout the state should incorporate topics and issues related to identification of, and appropriate services for, students with exceptional gifts and talents.

PERSPECTIVE: "Since all staff members are, in one way or another, responsible for recognizing and nurturing unique talents and abilities, they must be trained in effective strategies for accomplishing both goals."

RATIONALE: Accredited teacher preparation programs at the undergraduate and graduate level should include an emphasis on gifted education. Currently, teacher training programs are required to address the identification and needs of exceptional learners. However, because the federal and most state mandates relate only to disabled students, the needs of the gifted are often overlooked in teacher training. Identification and programming issues related to gifted students should be regarded as an essential component of all teacher training programs in the State of Maryland. Such issues include, but are not limited to:

* understanding the nature of intelligence, as well as the characteristics of gifted students;
* using a variety of means to find students with different talents;
* recognizing talent and ability in students who come from socioeconomic backgrounds different from ones own;
* recognition of talent among girls;
* helping to locate appropriate outlets and recognition for talent.

Furthermore, **in-depth training** is necessary for teachers who have specific assignments in gifted education. Specifically, two types of in-depth training are recommended with linkages provided between these two types of training components:

(1) characteristics and needs of the gifted, identification processes, curriculum development and differentiation, developmentally appropriate programming and teaching strategies for the gifted, underserved populations, and current issues and trends in gifted education; and

(2) content expertise, for advanced courses at the secondary level and for teachers at the elementary and early childhood levels to enable these teachers to accommodate accelerated content-related needs of advanced students. A particular emphasis should be placed on developing expertise in the areas of math and science.

All training efforts, whether implemented by colleges or universities, the Maryland State Department of Education, or local systems, must include specific components to address the needs of, and programming for, traditionally underserved populations. This includes attention to the needs of ethnic minorities, the gifted learning disabled, and females in the areas of math and science.

(Note: The task force is aware of the recommendations contained in the 1994 report of the Teacher Education Task Force. While we believe that the recommendations contained in our report are not inconsistent with those of the Teacher Education Task Force, we recognize areas of potential conflict that will need to be addressed by those responsible for implementing the recommendations from both reports.)

"Teachers must receive better training in how to teach high-level curricula. They need support for providing instruction that challenges all students sufficiently."
National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Six: ***What must the state, higher education, and local systems do to provide appropriate training for teachers and administrators?***

GIFTED EDUCATION CERTIFICATION

RECOMMENDATION 6.3: A Maryland Certification in Gifted Education should be developed and made available for teachers who wish to pursue this option.

PERSPECTIVE: "Additionally, the Maryland State Department of Education should work with the state's institutions of higher education and teacher certification agencies to develop programs within which teachers may earn a Maryland certificate in one or more aspects of gifted education."

RATIONALE: Many school systems in Maryland expressed support for an **optional** certification in gifted education in a recent survey regarding gifted and talented education. This certification would establish a state standard defining professional preparation in gifted education. Local school systems could use that standard as a guide in determining locally appropriate professional standards. .Teachers with an intense interest in the field would also have the pursuit of this certification available to them.

"Recent review of requirements for certification or endorsement identified 21 states that report such requirements."

Karnes and Whorton

Teacher Certification and Endorsement in Gifted Education: Past, Present, Future

STATE-SPONSORED TRAINING CENTERS

RECOMMENDATION 6.4: The state should develop regional training centers for staff development in counties with small student populations.

PERSPECTIVE: "Finally, the Maryland State Department of Education should provide leadership to local systems in identifying state resources available for staff development, as well as facilitating regional (or other collaborative) staff development efforts."

RATIONALE: As part of the state's role in providing a staff development network for talent development and gifted education, the establishment of regional staff development centers is needed. These regional centers need to be located in the counties with smaller populations where staff development efforts are restricted due to limited staff to provide the training. At least two of these centers are needed, one in the west (Garrett, Allegheny, Washington county) and one on the Eastern Shore.

It is evident from a review of the information provided in the task force survey of local school systems that the least effort is provided for training in the school systems with the smallest populations. The gifted students in these regions, in effect, become underserved by nature of their geographic location.

"One of the ironies of the educational reform movement is that at the same time that teachers are increasingly being asked to teach students how to solve problems, they are neither being provided the opportunity to solve problems themselves nor being equipped to do so by the institutions that train them."

Durden and Tangherlini

Smart Kids: How Academic Talents are Developed and Nurtured in America

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Six: ***What must the state, higher education, and local systems do to provide appropriate training for teachers and administrators?***

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

RECOMMENDATION 6.5: Local school systems should include talent identification, development and gifted education topics as part of both pre-service and in-service training for all staff.

PERSPECTIVE: "The need for continuing staff development to ensure clear understanding of the best ways to recognize and then meet the needs of uniquely talented students is imperative."

RATIONALE: Understanding the needs of students with exceptional abilities and being able to implement appropriate instructional interventions to meet those needs is the responsibility of all teachers. Research indicates that the educational program for most gifted and talented students is presented in the regular classroom. Therefore, it is essential that all teachers understand the unique needs of these students and effectively use instructional strategies to address those needs. As the school reform movement continues to emphasize the improvement of learning opportunities for all students, the most highly able group of students must be included.

In addition to teachers, school system administrators, counselors and other professionals who interact with students need to receive training regarding the needs of these students and how to provide appropriate programs for them. The responsibility for implementation of a successful instructional program is the shared responsibility of all within the school community. Principals, in particular, whose responsibilities include the evaluation of teachers, need to be aware of appropriate instructional strategies and curricular material to use with the highly able student. Others in the larger school community also share in this responsibility including parents, and business and community leaders.

A survey conducted in 1992 by the Maryland Coalition for Gifted and Talented Education, revealed that staff development was the second greatest area of need for program improvement in the state. In addition, a recent survey of local education agencies indicated great diversity in the degree of attention provided to the areas of staff development and teacher preparation across the state. Generally, the larger school systems provide fairly well-defined in-service programs, while many of the smaller counties rely on training opportunities provided by college and universities and through conferences. Some school systems provided no training.

If we are to achieve a world-class education for all our students, we must have a well-trained teaching and administrative staff in our schools. To achieve this will take the concerted effort of schools, communities, and state agencies.

"Beyond the classroom, there are a wide variety of other school personnel that may need some form of additional preparation if they are to play their roles most effectively in a program for gifted and talented students....The key to any good educational program is well-trained personnel and the proper administrative structure in which to put their training to maximum use."

James J. Gallagher
Teaching the Gifted Child

Key Question Seven:

What can state and local school systems do to make effective use of current and future technology in efforts to provide flexible services for gifted and talented students?

RECOMMENDATION 7.1.

OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Local and state education agencies should work together to develop technological resources that will extend learning opportunities for gifted and talented students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Seven: ***What can state and local school systems do to make effective use of current and future technology in efforts to provide flexible services for gifted and talented students?***

OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

RECOMMENDATION 7.1: Local and state education agencies should work together to develop technological resources that will extend learning opportunities for gifted and talented students.

PERSPECTIVE: "In addition, schools and school systems should provide students with instruction in technologies through which they will be able to access an ever-expanding array of services that can enrich their learning experiences. The expansion of technological possibilities within a school system can best be accomplished in collaboration with the Maryland State Department of Education, as well as state and private partnerships."

RATIONALE: America is an increasingly transforming, information-based, technological and global society. Lack of technological skills and resources will inhibit Americans from competing in a global economy and maintaining a high standard of living. The future belongs to those people who incorporate technology into their daily lives. Therefore, technology can no longer remain on the periphery, but must become an integral part of all curricula and become fully embedded in the teaching process.

Accessing, manipulating, and utilizing information are the essential skills necessary for all students to become productive members of a technological society. Special programs and resources must be provided to allow students to develop these skills. For example, telecommunications will change the way educational programs are delivered. The global access provided through Internet and Mednet will allow students to collaborate with students and professionals across the state, the nation, and the world. They will also be able to consult with scientists, professors, politicians and other adults with expertise.

Long-distance learning can provide a challenging curriculum for students who may otherwise not be able to attend specialized classes. Distance learning holds special promise for schools whose student body is small or for students with unusual talents and/or interests.

Age should not be the determining factor in primary access to technology. Elementary and middle school students, as well as high school students, must have access to the latest technology.

Equipping all students, including America's most talented, with current technological knowledge and skills, will allow them not only to compete internationally, but enable them to become effective problem solvers in a technological world.

"...the true promise of technology lies in the classroom. Technology makes it possible for today's schools to escape the assembly-line mentality of the 'factory model' school. With emerging hardware and software, educators can personalize learning."

National Education Commission on Time and Learning
Prisoners of Time

Key Question Eight:

What must the state do to provide special assistance and support to school systems who need such help to successfully implement these recommendations?

RECOMMENDATION 8.1.

SPECIAL FUNDING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Small school districts or systems with special circumstances that prevent the delivery of special services for gifted and talented students should be eligible for special funds and other technical assistance for staff development, equipment, and instructional purposes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Eight: ***What must the state do to provide special assistance and support for school systems who need such help to successfully implement these recommendations?***

SPECIAL FUNDING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

RECOMMENDATION 8.1: Small school districts or systems with special circumstances that prevent the delivery of special services for gifted and talented students should be eligible for special funds and other technical assistance for staff development, equipment, and instructional purposes.

PERSPECTIVE: "Some school systems — primarily because of size or geographic location — may be unable within current budget realities to provide the kind of services needed by their students. To ensure the fair and equitable treatment of students across the state, the Maryland State Department of Education will need to provide such school systems with incentives and support in the way of special funding/grants, as well as technical assistance."

RATIONALE: Approximately 12 of the 24 local school districts in Maryland would be considered to be either rural and/or small. These districts tend to be in the Western part of the state and in the Eastern Shore. While only enrolling 12% of Maryland's public school youth, they cover over half of the state geographically.

Such districts face unique challenges in providing services of all kinds to their constituents. The vast distances, small numbers of students, and limited resources (both personnel and equipment) are some of the dilemmas faced by instructional leaders in these areas.

In addition to small and/or rural school districts, other systems may face special circumstances that prevent the full implementation of the recommendations contained in this report. Although size and distance may not be the issue, equally formidable obstacles may have to be overcome.

Special financial support should be available to these schools in the form of "start-up funds" for the purpose of developing initiatives that will enhance education for their gifted students. Specific funding should be provided for transportation and technology for these areas. Since resources are so limited, efforts should be made to help these districts find alterative ways to deliver services, especially through distance-learning.

Efforts should be made to assist systems in organizing regional efforts to provide not only staff development opportunities (e.g., through local colleges and universities and summer centers) but also services for gifted students.

Collaborative efforts should be organized either through colleges and universities, regional staff development centers, or educational consortia to provide leadership in staff development and programming. If possible, systems should be encouraged to share resources, and incentives should be provided to those that do so. Such sharing would necessarily incorporate the flexibility to move students and/or instructional staff between counties/systems in order to provide appropriate instructional opportunities.

"In the final analysis, the true costs [of effective educational programs] depend upon what we think is important. If we value learning, the cost of 'doing it right the first time' is less than the expense involved in 'doing it wrong' and having to do it over again."

National Education Commission on Time and Learning
Prisoners of Time

Key Question Nine:

How should the state implement these recommendations and assist local school systems in developing, implementing, and monitoring their efforts?

RECOMMENDATION 9.1.

GIFTED AND TALENTED ADVISORY COUNCIL

The State Board of Education should appoint an on-going Gifted and Talented Advisory Council to develop fair and equitable timelines for implementation of the recommendations in this report, provide technical assistance to local school systems, and monitor the development and delivery of services for gifted and talented students across the state.

RECOMMENDATION 9.2.

STATEWIDE DATABASE

The Maryland State Department of Education should develop a database that contains a list of resources and educational options at the state and national level for meeting the needs of gifted and talented students.

RECOMMENDATION 9.3.

STATEWIDE INITIATIVE

In order to ensure that the recommendations of this report are fully implemented, a state initiative should be established to develop resources and provide technical assistance to local school systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Nine: ***How should the state implement these recommendations and assist local school systems in developing, implementing, and monitoring their efforts?***

GIFTED AND TALENTED ADVISORY COUNCIL

RECOMMENDATION 9.1: The State Board of Education should appoint an on-going Gifted and Talented Advisory Council to develop fair and equitable timelines for implementation of the recommendations in this report, provide technical assistance to local school systems, and monitor the development and delivery of services for gifted and talented students across the state.

PERSPECTIVE: "Most importantly, it requires a tangible commitment at the state level symbolized by a decisive plan accompanied by appropriate resources, as well as clear implementation deadlines."

RATIONALE: A thoughtful and effective implementation of the recommendations found in this report is essential for ensuring the continuing and equitable provision of services for gifted and talented students across the state. A representative group of informed and committed individuals should be available to support local school systems in developing and implementing concrete plans. On-going monitoring of the resulting plans and services will ensure that these recommendations will continue to make a difference for students across the state.

The responsibilities of the State Gifted and Talented Advisory Council would include:

- drafting fair and reasonable timelines for full implementation of the recommendations in this report;
- assisting LEA's in developing, implementing, and monitoring/evaluating their action plans;
- assisting MSDE in reviewing and providing feedback about the ongoing implementation of task force recommendations;
- preparing annual reports during implementation of task force recommendations;
- developing a biennial status report on gifted and talented education and presenting it to the State Board of Education and the public.

This advisory council should include representatives from the diverse groups that will be affected by these recommendations.

"We must ... be concerned with continued advocacy for gifted programming, creating and maintaining exemplary programs and practices that can serve as models of what can be accomplished for high ability students. ... To lose our quest for excellence in the current move to guarantee equity will undoubtedly result in a disappointing, if not disastrous, education for our most potentially able children."

Renzulli and Reis

The Reform Movement and the Quiet Crisis in Gifted Education

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Nine: ***How should the state implement these recommendations and assist local school systems in developing, implementing, and monitoring their efforts?***

STATEWIDE DATABASE

RECOMMENDATION 9.2: The Maryland State Department of Education should develop a database that contains a list of resources and educational options at the state and national level for meeting the needs of gifted and talented students.

PERSPECTIVE: "A state-wide, annotated database providing information to any school or individual on the resources available will ensure widespread dissemination of available options."

RATIONALE: A database of educational resources and options readily available to school personnel, students, and parents would assist parents and schools in more fully meeting the variety of needs presented by all students, but especially talented students. Such a database should be constantly revised, all constituencies informed of its contents, and information made available on how to access it.

In addition, MSDE should provide leadership in recognizing outside-of-school experiences such as internships, opportunities to work with experts or mentors, or academic coursework at a local college or in a summer program such as those conducted by universities and colleges as legitimate educational options that supplement and enrich a school's attempts to meet the needs of its most able students. Schools should be strongly encouraged to integrate such experiences into a student's full educational program, and award credit if legitimate academic work is successfully completed. At the very least, schools should be required to consider such experiences when placement decisions are made. The MSDE can take an active leadership role by not only encouraging such activities at the local level, but also by facilitating such actions through information and guidelines on how a school can integrate such extracurricular activities into its ongoing attempts to assist talent development.

"Communities must establish learning opportunities for students both inside and outside the regular classroom and both inside and outside the school building."
National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent

Key Question Nine: ***How should the state implement these recommendations and assist local school systems in developing, implementing, and monitoring their efforts?***

STATEWIDE INITIATIVE

RECOMMENDATION 9.3: In order to ensure that the recommendations of this report are fully implemented, a state initiative should be established to develop resources and provide technical assistance to local school systems.

PERSPECTIVE: "We strongly believe that appropriate programming for gifted and talented students, while only one component of the total reform necessary to improve the quality of academic environments for all children, is a crucial, non-negotiable element of that reform."

RATIONALE: It is imperative that the mission and, thus, the recommendations of the Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education be translated into direct action through a purposeful, systematic and thoughtful process. Although each school system must be allowed to reflect its unique needs in its local choices for how best to provide the most appropriate and necessary educational services for its students, these choices should not be in conflict with the intent of the recommendations in this report. If the recommendations of the task force are to be substantively implemented in a timely fashion and in a manner that is consistent with the mission conveyed by the task force, the Maryland State Department of Education must take a strong leadership role.

Local school systems need direction, support, and assistance in implementing these recommendations. A systematic plan to assist systems, clearly articulated and backed by necessary funds is essential. Both short- and long-range goals must be developed to provide the time and funding required for these changes to occur. Most importantly, the Maryland State Department of Education must provide leadership in establishing the philosophy and mission, as well as the standards necessary to ensure that the educational needs of Maryland's gifted and talented students are fully recognized and accommodated in every Maryland school.

Fiscal resources and technical assistance, as well as guidelines, must be available on a need basis to assist each school system in assessing its needs, developing priorities, and developing a plan of action. There must be a recognition that local plans must reflect local needs and resources, as well as widely differing services currently available from one system to another. A commitment to appropriately serve gifted and talented students, a reasonable plan in response to this commitment, and demonstrated action in moving forward in this regard should, however, be required of every local system.

To support the mission conveyed in this report, the Maryland State Department of Education should undertake a major initiative designed to establish the support, funds, and resources needed. In addition to the actions contained in the task force's recommendations, the following activities are recommended.

PROPOSED ACTIVITIES:

The state will:

- Hold regional meetings to inform the public and all affected constituencies of the task force's recommendations.
- Revise the document "Criteria for Excellence" that defines gifted and talented students and provides guidelines for appropriate identification and programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Nine: ***How should the state implement these recommendations and assist local school systems in developing, implementing, and monitoring their efforts?***

- Develop a self-assessment instrument for schools to use and provide assistance in the use of the instrument to assess needs and discrepancies related to task force recommendations.
- Conduct a statewide conference on gifted and talented education with workshops and presentations designed to clarify state guidelines and demonstrate how systems can translate recommendations into services and programs.
- Seek funding from sources such as the legislature, Department of Education, and/or foundations to support the implementation of recommendations.
- Establish a clearinghouse and statewide network for exemplary practices currently in existence.
- Evaluate the implementation efforts of local systems.

"The goal of education must be to develop a society in which people can live more comfortably with change than with rigidity. Such a goal implies, in turn, that educators must themselves be open and flexible, and must be effectively involved in the process of change..."

Carl Rogers
On Becoming a Person

KEY QUESTION 10:

How should the impact of the recommendations for Gifted and Talented Education be evaluated?

RECOMMENDATION 10.1.

STATE REPORT CARD

The State Report Card should include data that provides information on the achievement of the most able students in the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Ten: ***How should the impact of the recommendations for gifted and talented education be evaluated?***

STATE REPORT CARD

RECOMMENDATION 10.1: The State Report Card should include data that provides information on the achievement of the most able students in the state.

PERSPECTIVE: "The Maryland State Department of Education, as well as local school systems, must develop and implement internal and external vehicles for evaluating services and programs. In particular, the state should develop strategies for evaluating the levels at which the most able students in the state are achieving."

RATIONALE: A mechanism should be in place to evaluate the impact of the recommendations finally adopted. As a first step in developing this mechanism, the State Report Card should include data that provides an assessment and evaluation of the achievement levels of the state's most able students. The following data should be considered for inclusion on the State Report Card since it will provide an objective evaluation against a common standard:

Percentage of students in a school or school system taking Advanced Placement courses or other college-level courses while in high school.

Percentage of students in a school or system who score 3, 4, or 5 on Advanced Placement examinations.

Percentage of students in a school or system who take the PSAT and/or the SAT.

Percentage of students in a school or system who score at or above the national mean for college-bound seniors on the verbal or mathematics section of the SAT.

Percentage of students in a school or system who score a 1 on the MSPAP in grades 3, 5, and 8.

Percentage of students in a school or system who score at or above the 90th percentile on the CTBS.

Number of students in a school or system participating in academic programs outside of school (e.g., Maryland Summer Centers, Center for Talented Youth Summer Program, science camps).

Number of students participating in state, national, and international academic competitions; as well as number receiving awards or recognition.

At the present time, there is little data reported on the Maryland Report Card that provides an indication of the achievement levels of the most able students in the state. Maryland is at the forefront in educational reforms for measuring students' achievement for the purpose of providing baseline data that can be used

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Question Ten: ***How should the impact of the recommendations for gifted and talented education be evaluated?***

for school improvement planning. As we move forward with these reforms, it is critical that we make sure that this information not only allows us to plan for the typical child, but for all special populations, including the gifted and talented. To do this, we must be able to assess adequately whether all subgroups of students are achieving at high levels and consistent with their ability level.

The first step in this process is to include data on the Maryland School Report Card that reflects the performance of our most able students on a variety of standardized measures, as well as the MSPAP.

Because standardized assessments are not the only measure of students' performance and growth, the next step will be for local school systems with the help of state and national models to develop evaluation plans that fit with their local goals and available data. In order to assist locals as they develop their evaluation process, the Maryland State Department of Education should develop standards and measures that account for the fact that gifted and talented students often score off the scale of most commonly used tests. MSDE should also make available evaluation models that have been successfully implemented.

"At a minimum, states should set standards for evaluation and assessment to create systems of accountability that will ensure that local school districts are meeting the needs of all children, including those with outstanding talent potential."

Passow and Rudnitski

State Policies Regarding Education of the Gifted as Reflected in Legislation and Regulation

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APPENDIX A

Gifted and Talented Education in Maryland

Background

In the Spring of 1982, the State Superintendent of Schools in Maryland, David Hornbeck, appointed a task force to advise him and the Maryland State Department of Education concerning educational programming for gifted and talented students. That task force presented its recommendations to the superintendent and the Maryland State Board of Education in May 1983.

Many of the issues addressed in the 1983 report remain with us today. For example, mathematics and science education, particularly at the elementary school level, was seen as weak and in need of attention. This remains true today. The needs of underserved students were discussed in the 1983 report and much still remains to be done in this area. The 1983 task force recognized the critical role of well-trained, motivated teachers and the importance of on-going staff development in any attempt to provide appropriate educational experiences for talented students. Teacher training, as well as staff selection and development, are still critical elements that must be addressed.

As the current task force began its deliberations, it understood the continuing status of these issues and committed itself to addressing them in as direct and forceful a manner as possible. In addition, there are several forces currently affecting the educational community that were recognized by the group as having a negative influence on the ability of the state and local systems to provide appropriate and comprehensive educational services to our most able students. Since these forces influenced the deliberations of the task force and, ultimately, its recommendations, they are discussed in the introduction and mission statement to this report.

Current Status of Gifted and Talented Education in Maryland

To assess the current status of gifted and talented education in Maryland, each local education agency was surveyed by the task force. The group also examined the results of a study conducted by the Maryland Coalition for Gifted and Talented Education in 1992, as well as a 1988 study by the Center for Talented Youth, Johns Hopkins University. In addition, discussions were held with LEA Gifted and Talented liaisons and Maryland State Department of Education staff.

Although some improvement has been made in some areas since 1983, overall there has been little progress and, in some areas, we have actually lost ground. What follows is the result of a careful review of the information submitted by each LEA to the request of this task force for information about the current status of programs for the gifted and talented students.

Given that Maryland has no state mandate regarding programming for the gifted and talented, it is surprising to find areas in the state where comprehensive, quality services are being provided. However, what is decidedly more disheartening is the fact that there are some counties with little or no programming of any kind. This fact is even more disappointing when one considers that many of these counties had active, successful programs in full operation as recently as five years ago. What has transpired in such a short time to account for this rather shocking disappearance of programs for the gifted? Further, why do we see a significant reduction in the commitment of some counties to their programs in terms of partial or nearly complete loss of supervisory and teaching personnel, as well as other components critical to the operation of a meaningful program?

What is apparent in the overall status of programs for the gifted in the LEA's in Maryland is the great inequities that have come about between and among counties as a result of 3 factors:

(1) Maryland has no mandate or minimum program standards for the education of the gifted.

(2) A lack of MSDE leadership in the following areas of the education for gifted and talented students:

- clear direction and focus for programming and teacher training;
- facilitation of networking, sharing of best practices and resources, and joint multi-county planning and implementation strategies; and,

(3) Until very recently, a lack of state funding to assist counties in providing services for talented students.

The fact that MSDE has for several years had no full-time, designated person responsible for monitoring programs for the gifted, and has instead assigned responsibility to one or more individuals who were already responsible for very challenging and demanding programs, has communicated a message that caring for the needs of highly able students is not a priority. The absence of full-time MSDE staff with the responsibility for supporting and overseeing gifted and talented education in the state, as well as an overall reduction of budgeted funds has resulted in:

- few, and in some cases no, annual meetings of LEA G&T liaisons to discuss on-going efforts or to share ideas and concerns;
- significant changes in the format and operation of the nationally-recognized Maryland Summer Centers for the Gifted and Talented; and,
- the annual practice of publishing a report outlining the status of programs for the gifted in each LEA and describing "best practices" being discontinued.

It is not hard to understand, then, why some LEA's have felt comfortable in reducing or eliminating programs for the gifted and talented as they have been faced with budget constraints. Currently, there are few incentives to maintain programs for highly able students or to begin such programs.

To be fair, several counties have continued to provide many exemplary programs for gifted students. Some counties have even expanded the range and breadth of their programming during the last few years. However, all of these movements were brought about because the systems individually had strong philosophical and practical commitments to these types of programs or there were individual catalysts (superintendents, board members, curriculum staff personnel, parent groups) who had the vision to recognize the system's responsibility to provide ways to meet the needs of gifted and talented students.

Although the larger, growing and/or wealthier counties have managed to continue to provide quality services for the gifted and talented, they have not been exempt from budget cutbacks and loss of personnel directly responsible for providing such services. As expected, however, smaller counties, especially those most affected by recent recession-related budget cuts, have been unable to continue their support of programs for the gifted and talented, and have experienced the most dramatic program reductions or eliminations.

Although glaring statewide inequities in wealth and community commitment to the funding of education are apparent across the spectrum of educational program efforts, nowhere are they more obvious than in the education of the gifted and talented. These inequities, compounded by the reduction in state staff and overall funding for gifted and talented education, have had a devastating effect on the provision of programs to meet the very real needs of highly able students.

A brief summary of the major findings obtained from the survey of local school systems follows.

APPENDIX A

Gifted and Talented Education in Maryland

STUDENT ACCESS TO PROGRAMS

- Not all systems identify students throughout grades K-12.
- Some site-based identification procedures are unique to specific schools and are not system-wide.
- Many systems make no specific efforts to identify minority or disadvantaged students.
- Not all LEAs match their identification procedures to program features.
- Many LEAs indicated a need for more teacher training in the area of identification and recognition of talent.

PROGRAM ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

- The present state of programming varies widely from a minimal level of service to provisions for full-day special programs for students.
- A few LEAs have a range of programs to meet the varying needs of students and to develop a range of talents.
- The presence, or lack, of designated personnel is reflected in the number, range, and variety of programs offered.
- Most LEAs indicated that, over the last several years, budget cuts have had devastating effects on programs, ranging from program reduction to program elimination.
- All LEAs requested from MSDE greater opportunities for networking (e.g., sharing strategies, materials, etc.) among systems and individual professionals, and more teacher training opportunities in gifted and talented education across the state.

PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- Staff development and professional preparation opportunities vary from one-day inservice to three-credit courses in gifted education.
- Some LEAs provide reimbursement for teachers to attend conferences or cover tuition for college coursework.
- Few LEAs provide staff development in the areas of identification and/or programming for underserved populations.
- Few LEAs provide guidelines or requirements for professional development or advanced training.
- Only one LEA indicated no need for training or staff development in gifted and talented education.

Previous studies and recommendations identified critical needs in the area of gifted and talented education. However, many of the proposals put forth to address these issues have been only partially implemented or received only short-term support. The needs have not changed. Furthermore, additional concerns have arisen, creating an even wider array of issues that must be addressed. Now is the time to address forthrightly the education of students with outstanding talent and ability, and respond to the very real needs identified in 1983 and again by this task force.

APPENDIX B

The Charge to the Maryland Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education

Charge to the Task Force

In September 1993, the Maryland State Superintendent of Schools established the Maryland Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education. The charge to the task force was "to study the current status of gifted and talented education across the State of Maryland and make appropriate recommendations..."

Co-chaired by Carol Mills, Director of Research at the Center for Talented Youth (CTY) of The Johns Hopkins University, and Russell Beaton, Curriculum Specialist for Gifted and Talented Education/Communications Specialist for Frederick County Schools, the task force was composed of representatives from local boards of education, parent groups, local school systems, students, research and higher education, as well as State Department of Education staff.

The study and preparation of the report of the task force took place over a 14-month period. During that time, the task force developed a mission statement and a set of principles for improving gifted and talented education that are reflected in the recommendations of the group.

Task force members studied monographs from the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented; published research articles on "best practices"; a variety of MSDE documents; and reports from several recent state-wide studies. The 1983 report of the Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education was carefully reviewed by the group. With the timely publication of the document "National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent" by the U.S. Department of Education, the task force was able to align its recommendations with those made in the national report.

National, state, and local educators and researchers reviewed the work of the task force at several stages of the study and provided valuable reactions and suggestions. Several prominent national, state and local educators served as consultants for information, research, and reactions. Drafts of the report were reviewed by state and local advocacy groups, and two interim presentations were made to the Maryland State Board of Education.

In its work, the task force addressed each of these objectives that were included in the charge:

- Student Access to Programs: Definition, Identification, Equity and Underserved Populations
- Mathematics and Science Education
- Program Organization and Administration
- Performance Assessment
- School Improvement Planning
- Professional Preparation and Staff Development

Recommendations are organized around key questions that address issues pertaining to appropriate and effective services for gifted and talented students. The initiatives contained in the recommendations, in the judgment of the task force, will not only result in an exemplary educational program for our most able students, but also have the potential for improving educational services for all Maryland public school students.

APPENDIX C

Members of the Maryland Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education

Appointed by State Superintendent Nancy S. Grasmick in September of 1993, these persons were selected to serve on the Maryland Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education.

Carol Mills
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Director of Research, Ctr. for Talented Youth
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Russell Beaton
Co-Chairperson
Curriculum Specialist for
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Patricia Brooks
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Marcia Clarke
Maryland Coalition for Gifted and Talented Education

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Sarah Duff
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William Ecker
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Howard County Public Schools

Stephen J. Herman
President
Garrett County Community College

APPENDIX C

Members of the Maryland Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education

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Joan Maynard
Ex-Officio Member
State Board of Education

Joan Roache
Maryland Coalition for Gifted and Talented Education

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Mark Smith
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Montgomery County Public Schools

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Emily Stewart
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APPENDIX D

Consultants to and reviewers of the work of the Maryland Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education

The Maryland Task Force on Gifted & Talented Education is grateful to the following persons and organizations who provided suggestions in reaction to draft materials produced by the task force during its study.

William Durden
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Johns Hopkins University

Eastern Shore of MD Educational Consortium

James J. Gallagher
Director of the Carolina Policy Institute for
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Freeman Hrabowski
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University of Maryland Baltimore County

Maryland Coalition for Gifted and Talented Education

MSDE/LEA Gifted and Talented Liaisons

Allison Cole
Robert Reis
Student Reviewers

APPENDIX E

Maryland State Department of Education Staff who contributed to this report

The Maryland Task Force on Gifted and Talented Education is grateful for the contributions to the work of the task force of these staff members of the Division of Instruction, Maryland State Department of Education.

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Antoinette Favazza
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Judith G. Stough
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Positions indicated are those held at the time of service to the Task Force.

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